DECLINE AND FALL OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

Contested Histories and Revisionist Tales

Ronald Binns

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All photographs © Ronald Binns

There is no question connected with the Loch Ness Monster to which the answer is altogether a simple one.

Constance Whyte, *More Than a Legend* (1957)

Truly there is no such thing as finality.

Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897)

for April

Preface

In the large bookstore in the shopping mall in Inverness I search the 'Local History' section for books about the Loch Ness Monster. I come across Highland Legends and Ghosts of the Highlands and all kinds of local history books. But nothing on Nessie. In the end I go to the Information Desk and ask where I might find books on the Loch Ness Monster.

The young woman smiles and points, saying, 'The children's section is over there, sir.'

Has it really come to this? Apparently it has – at least in the bookshop closest to Loch Ness. The blood-curdling beast from the lower depths which Ted Holiday once thrillingly identified as 'nature's ultimate horror' has become understood first and foremost as a cuddly, comic character in children's books.

I explain I am looking for *serious* books about the Loch Ness Monster.

She frowns. 'Yes, I think we do have something.' But she can't quite remember where. I follow her around the store and eventually she finds the non-fiction literature, on a shelf at ankle-height, at the foot of a pillar. Evidently there isn't much demand for Monster books these days.

She stoops and brings up the only two titles which they stock. One is Adrian Shine's short glossy booklet for the tourist market, *Loch Ness*. The other is Gareth Williams's *A Monstrous Commotion*.

'There aren't any experts left apart from these two guys,' she tells me brightly.

I thank her for her effort in locating these books.

'These two guys are *the real experts*,' she repeats, with insistent cheerful confidence.

And she must be right, because she's from the Information Desk.

This encounter made me recall how, over thirty years ago, grimly surveying the available literature on the Loch Ness Monster, Henry H. Bauer complained that 'The public simply does not know who the real authorities on Nessie are.' At the time Bauer was writing there were

books by authors as various as Tim Dinsdale, F. W. Holiday and Frank Searle, each purporting to offer an accurate history of the Monster and an identification of the animal. There was also Maurice Burton's *The Elusive Monster*, which Bauer complained discounted 'virtually all the evidence that most others regard as persuasive'. F. W. Holiday also fretted about the worrisome impact of Burton's revisionist views: 'Thoughtful people who had read the books of R. T. Gould and Constance Whyte were not sure what to think.'

By 1983 there was also a book by one Ronald Binns, the title of which was bound to make the blood of a believer like Bauer boil. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* suggested that the conventional Loch Ness story was an exercise in misinformation, that every single one of the eyewitnesses had been mistaken and had simply misinterpreted known phenomena, and that the 'hard' evidence didn't amount to a hill of beans. In his role as self-appointed gatekeeper of 'authority' Bauer was not willing either to describe the book's arguments or to engage with them: he simply slammed the door shut with a five-word rejection. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was, he magisterially asserted, 'an exemplar of specious reasoning'.

Bauer was far from being the first writer to suggest that, given the sheer quantity of material, it was hard to get a sense of perspective. The American writer James Thurber asserted that 'It takes ten hours to read through the *Daily Mail*'s monster clippings' (a remark presumably based on the bitter personal experience of his paid researcher, Nora Sayre). Thurber added, 'the literature of the Loch Ness monster is now vast, unorganized, and bewildering'. Ironically, he wrote that in 1957, at a time when only two books on the subject had been published. Six decades later the number of full-length Nessie books exceeds thirty, to which needs to be added numerous monographs, articles and reviews, not to mention tens of thousands of news reports of sightings, together with the continuing publication of new photographs purporting to be of an unknown animal in Loch Ness. In addition there have been scores of television documentaries. Finally, the arrival of the internet has resulted in an explosion of data and opinion, ranging from live webcams to blogs, tweets and Facebook discussion pages. No one can now possibly keep up with this torrent of material or ever go back and read all of it.

Henry Bauer's complaint that no one new to the subject can tell who 'the real authorities on Nessie are' might seem to take on new force, in

the light of the current deluge of available material on the subject. But the whole idea of *authority* in connection with the Loch Ness Monster is a dubious one. There are no exams to pass in order to become a Nessie expert. There are no educational institutions awarding degrees in Nessieology. There are no Professors of Cryptozoology, whose expertise and scientific knowledge are widely respected. There is not even a bibliography of writings about the Monster.

At best, there are reputable academics who became believers but who arrived from disciplines irrelevant to a supposed zoological entity of enormous dimensions. Roy Mackal was an authority on bateriophage viruses; Henry H. Bauer was a chemistry teacher. Nowadays, where the background of a Nessie authority is of relevance (Darren Naish is a paleozoological expert), they are likely to be unequivocal sceptics.

Standards of scholarship are patchy or non-existent in books about the Monster. Online discourse is far worse – a Babel of commentators (mainly pseudonymous) voicing unsourced 'facts', sweeping generalisations and dodgy 'analysis', framed by opinions which tend to be articulated with a passion that sometimes dissolves into furious abuse and anger.

Although 'the Loch Ness story' has been told many times, there is not one account that can really be called either comprehensive or even reasonably objective. Nicholas Witchell's *The Loch Ness Story* provided a good account of the case for the Monster in the first fifty years of its existence. My own book, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, written with the assistance of Rod Bell (another disillusioned ex-LNI member), turned that tradition inside out and asserted that the Monster had no tangible existence as a species of large unknown animal. More recently Gareth Williams's *A Monstrous Commotion* has retold the Loch Ness story, ostensibly from an impartial perspective, giving both sides of the argument. But Williams's book leans heavily on the available literature and its narrative ends where those earlier books did, in the 1980s. And as Williams explains in his Acknowledgements, he was 'lucky to have the wisdom of several experts', in particular the 'triumvirate' of Dick Raynor, Adrian Shine and Nicholas Witchell. All three are believers-turned-sceptics. Witchell's apostasy is perhaps the most astonishing in the entire history of the Loch Ness saga, yet Williams never enquires into it.

In so far as it is imbued with a version of the history of the Monster saga shaped by this triumvirate, the narrative cannot be said to be

objective. At a quite basic level, *A Monstrous Commotion* is tilted heavily in one direction. It is a hugely entertaining and often comic account of a sequence of misadventures – a kind of *Carry on Monster Hunting*. It is a book that is unlikely to convert the unconverted to a belief in the Monster. Williams's scepticism is obvious, despite his description of Loch Ness as 'vast and impenetrable, and a place where almost anything could be hiding'. Henry Bauer has noticed that the book is not Monster-friendly: 'throughout the text, the book makes a case implicitly against the reality of Nessies by denigrating those of us whom he calls believers and by mis-describing the evidence through the lenses of the debunkers, whom he mis-describes as skeptics.' But from the other side of the argument one might note that, as a history of Loch Ness scepticism, Williams's account is far from being either balanced or comprehensive.

In short, 'the real authorities' don't exist. Instead there are simply authors with strong opinions and an agenda or monster hunters like Steve Feltham whose media status as experts is acquired by the longevity of their dedication. And although there is a body of information upon which anyone can draw for enlightenment there is no comprehensive account of events at Loch Ness over the past eighty-five years. There is not even a reliable inventory of documented sightings. The files of newspapers reveal many historic reports which have slipped through the net. Patrick J. Gallagher's two compilations of original press reports, *Loch Ness: From Out of the Depths* (covering the years 1933-34), and *Loch Ness: Back into the Depths* (covering the years 1935-55), indicate just how much fascinating material has failed to be recorded in the conventionally told 'Loch Ness story'. These volumes contain many gems, not least the revelation that Robert Lawson Cassie reported a sighting in June 1934. Cassie, identified (most probably by himself) as 'the northern author', apparently on the basis of six now long-forgotten collections of poetry, would later produce *The Monsters of Achanalt*, an utterly bizarre account of giant monsters regularly witnessed in the vicinity of a hamlet on one of the wilder stretches of the Kyle of Lochalsh railway line. Cassie's contribution to the genre of lake monster books is so eccentric that to this day it is hard to tell whether or not the author was a satirist or simply deranged. His long-forgotten 'monster' report to the *Aberdeen Journal* (25 June 1934) is equally problematic. Cassie describes how he and his companions spent fifteen minutes observing the 'violently agitated' waters of Urquhart Bay, which revealed 'regular glimpses' of a

monster estimated to be forty feet in length. They then drove round to the opposite side of the bay and watched it for another ten minutes. The commotion was such that 'the rear part of the animal might have rested on the shallow bottom during these apparent hopping movements, consistent with those of a gigantic frog'. Cassie finishes: 'In our last sighting of the creature it was rushing in our direction, but we did not see it submerge. It simply was not, and we waited vainly for its reappearance.' The episode sounds like nothing so much as the over-imaginative misinterpretation of a wind-whipped loch surface but whether or not Cassie had his tongue wedged firmly in his cheek is open to debate.

Everyone who has an opinion about the Monster claims their own expertise and authority, especially those who write books on the subject. But every analysis is an attempt to persuade. Henry Bauer found author F. W. Holiday to be 'gullible in the extreme' and guilty of 'gratuitous improbabilities' while sleekly maintaining that Tim Dinsdale's books were 'reliable' and that the Academy of Applied Science brought to Loch Ness 'a dazzling combination of the highest expertise'. The tone of monster advocacy frequently combines the magisterial with the coercive.

What bothered Bauer back in 1986 was the diversity of existing opinion. It was bad enough that there were sceptics. What was even worse was the lack of agreement among believers and the uneven quality of the literature. But though he claimed to be making an argument about knowledge and standards, his philosophical point was in reality a rhetorical device to suppress dissent. By implication, Henry H. Bauer knew who *the real authorities* were. He was happy to name them. Top of the list were Tim Dinsdale and Robert H. Rines. It was to such individuals that the public should go in search of knowledge and enlightenment. To echo the words of the charming young woman in the Inverness bookstore, those two guys were *the real experts*. Others, whether they were believers like Peter Costello and F. W. Holiday, or sceptics like Ronald Binns, simply clouded understanding of the Monster. Books by such authors were an impediment to an appreciation of the Monster's basic reality.

The Loch Ness story has always had its gatekeepers. Bauer is scarcely alone in seeking to insist that certain accounts possess great authority, while others are not fit even to be discussed and must be rigorously excluded. In the era of the modern internet there is no more zealous protector of the Monster's moth-eaten reputation than blogger Roland

'One Star' Watson, who for some years has policed the Amazon site, issuing the lowest rating possible to any book which dares to question the evidence for Nessie. Watson has demonstrably not read the books he rages against, underlining the extent to which belief can tip over into the wild, intense fervour of fundamentalism and all the insecurities it masks. That Watson's own self-published Monster books are clumsily amateurish in format and slipshod and unscholarly in their contents compounds the irony of his severe judgements. He magisterially hands out lowly reviews to authors like Daniel Loxton and Darren Naish, who are fluent and knowledgeable authors whose work is published in elegant and professional editions by commercial presses. This exhibits a remarkable and shameless impudence on Watson's part. His sputtering 'reviews' also indicate a desperate and naïve belief that a book's worth can be defined by its overall Amazon rating.

Watson himself supplies an ironic example of a believer whose defence of Nessie has shifted radically over the years. When *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was first published in May 1983, Watson sent an account of the book to *Nessletter*, a small subscriber-only news sheet produced on a typewriter and distributed by Rip Hepple, a former LNI volunteer. Hepple reported Watson as saying 'perhaps Ronald Binns is right, and we have grossly overestimated witnesses, "seeing is what you want to believe". He feels that the book will unconvert believers…' The book had obviously left Watson a little shaken. In short, Watson's review registered and acknowledged the power of the first book to question comprehensively the existence of monsters in Loch Ness. The unexpected arrival of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Monster's first recorded appearance, sent a shock-wave through the fraternity of activists and believers (which was then much greater in numbers than today):

> The motivating question of the book is 'Why is there so little evidence for so many hours of surveillance?' Roland Watson says that is a crucial question indeed; but he feels he has an answer, that is because it is indeed sometimes not there at all, because it is a tulpa.

Readers unfamiliar with tulpas were referred to an earlier issue of *Nessletter*, where all was explained:

> Roland [Watson] believes the creatures are Tulpas or materialised thought forms.
>
> At first the Tulpa is nebulous and almost intangible but further meditation and mental visualisation of the Tulpa fully materialises it.
>
> Roland is trying to fit Ley-lines into this theory…

In short, Watson was plainly in thrall to F. W. Holiday's paranormal explanation for the absence of tangible physical evidence. Watson's fresh contribution to this topic was a piece of mumbo-jumbo statistical analysis which established to his satisfaction that out of a sample of eighty-three land and water sightings of the Loch Ness Monster '36 were within 100m of a ley-line'. Further calculation elicited the exciting conclusion that 'the odds of 36 sightings occurring within 100m of a ley-line is about 1.4 billion to one'.

One rather basic drawback to such analysis is that ley lines don't exist. They were dreamed up by Alfred Watkins, who believed he had discovered a hitherto unidentified network of ancient straight trackways across the British landscape and who promoted his theory in three books published in the period 1922-27. In the 1960s the concept was revived, with the new thrilling suggestion that ley lines might be connected to the passage of alien spacecraft. Authors such as Janet and Colin Bord and John Michell popularised ley lines in paperback bestsellers, and there was even *Ley-Hunter* magazine for true enthusiasts. Ley lines could be discovered by anyone with an Ordnance Survey map and a ruler, with the added fun of speculating about what secret and mysterious energy they harboured. But by the end of the 1970s the fad had run its course. It was finally extinguished by two professional archaeologists, Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy, whose book *Ley Lines in Question* exposed in some detail the shambolic amateurism, false assumptions and sheer factual inaccuracies of the ley line brigade. Ironically, their definitive hatchet-job was published in 1983, the same year as *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*.

Many years later, after the arrival of the internet, Roland Watson was reborn as a blogger. He had by now given up on Tulpas and decided that Nessie was a biological animal rather than a thought form. But evidence for a monster remained as elusive as ever, and as the years passed

Watson's tone became less even-tempered. Within days of discovering that *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* – my belated follow-up to *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* – was being published in 2017 he rushed to post on Amazon an angry, hostile 'review' of a second-hand copy of its predecessor. He alluded to his ancient letter to Hepple:

> I wrote a review on this book when it came out in 1983. Even then, some other Loch Ness Monster sceptics were calling it "prematurely titled" with the reference to the word "solved".

This was simply untrue. Watson's reference is to Tony Harmsworth, who in 1983 was a fervent believer and who is cited as such in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Harmsworth's gibe that the book was 'prematurely titled' did not appear until the twenty-first century, on his website, by which time he had embraced scepticism (but not a sense of irony).

Watson went on to assert that:

> [Binns's] treatment of Alex Campbell, a major part of the Loch Ness mystery, would have lead [*sic*] to lawsuits if directed at other people. Fortunately for Binns, he timed the publication of his book to only a few weeks after Campbell's death.

Here, Watson combines delusion with one of his characteristic inaccuracies. Alex Campbell was alive and, according to one account, fully in command of 'His sense of humour' when *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was published in May 1983. In fact, the book's appearance was quite deliberately 'timed' to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Nessie's birth on 2 May 1933. The idea that publication was in any way contingent on Alex Campbell's state of health (of which neither my publisher nor I had the slightest knowledge) is a fantasy that exposes Watson's ignorance of commercial publishing schedules. It is also curious that in 1983, in his 'review' for *Nessletter*, Watson had nothing at all to say about the book's critique of Campbell.

But, of course, correcting Watson's errors and misrepresentations becomes in the end an exhausting and barren task. It is enough to say that my second book on the subject, *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, comprehensively engaged with Watson's blog and his book *The Water Horses of Loch Ness*. My book was published in August 2017 and at first

Watson's only response was to inform his readers that he was 'too busy' to read it. By the end of that year he reported 'I still have not got round to reading it'. Watson, who blogs once or twice a week about Nessie, seriously expected his readers to believe that he had no time to read the only book published about the Loch Ness Monster in 2017 – one, moreover, which mentions him repeatedly. A year after publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* he continued to remain silent about its demolition of his own *The Water Horses of Loch Ness*. Watson has since produced two more Nessie books which omit all mention of the one Monster book prepared to engage with his blog, his arguments and the classic evidence. It is almost as if he doesn't want his readers to know that such a critique exists. Needless to say, this has not prevented him from regularly raging about sceptics, in a windy, generalising manner.

It never used to be like this. Tim Dinsdale's acknowledgement of scepticism was distinguished by a kind of rueful melancholy rather than furious anger and it was tempered by his absolute certainty of eventual success. As he confidently wrote in 1966:

> In recent times, technical strides in optical science have put the monster-hunter in a commanding position. The big, ultra-flexible zoom lens now enables him to approach an object of up to a mile or more in distance, and stay within frame and focus of it down to a matter of yards. It is the perfect weapon, this variable piece of optical artillery; the view through which on a reflex camera is a constant source of entertainment – but it forms only a part of a range of equipment, the controlled use of which will, I believe, ultimately defeat the sceptics.

But fifty-three years later close-up movie film of the Monster remains as elusive as ever, as does any physical or other persuasive evidence for its existence.

Henry Bauer's notion of 'authority' is a bizarre one in the context of the Loch Ness Monster. The Monster has always been a hotly contested phenomenon. There is the basic division between scepticism and belief but within both camps there are varieties of explanation and dissent. Above all else, the Monster is subject to constant reinvention and the Loch Ness story is constantly being rewritten and refreshed. Material is deleted without acknowledgement or silently revised. It is in the folds

and creases of these arguments rather than the depths of Loch Ness that, arguably, revelation may be found.

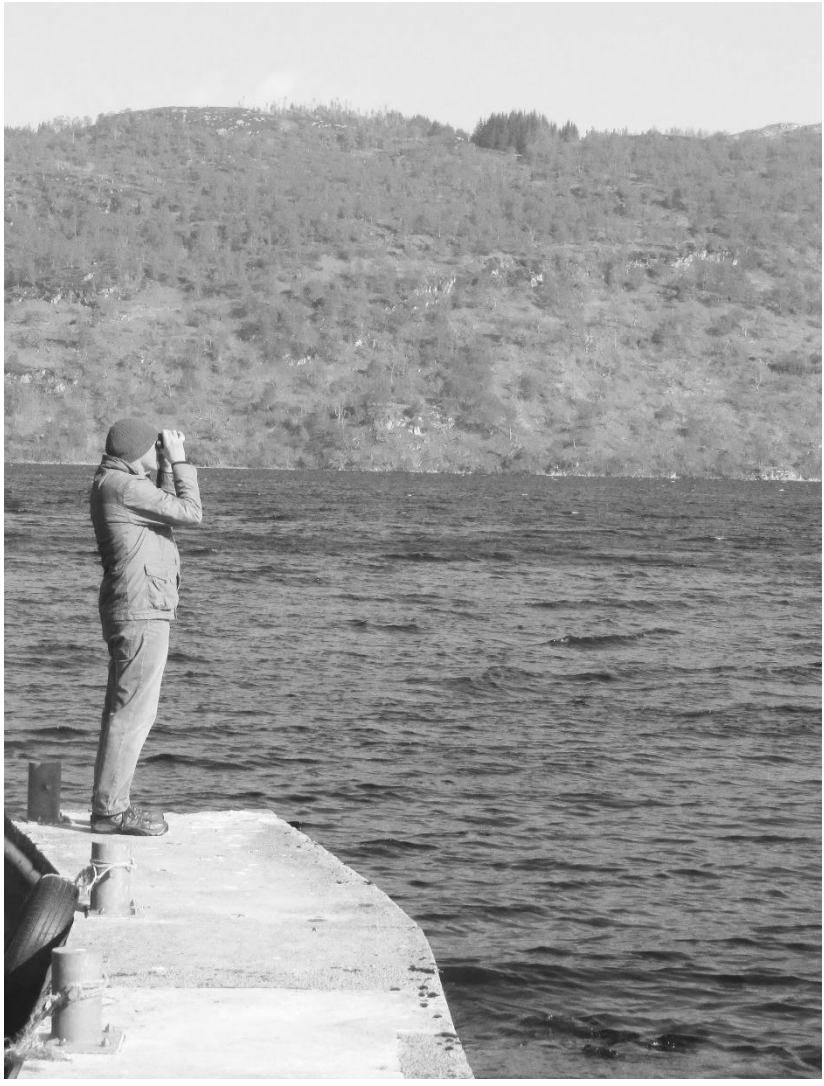
The subject and its history are fundamentally unstable, as befits a shape-shifting entity which has been variously identified as physically tangible but elusive, not biological but paranormal or, alternatively, a phantom of the human imagination, a supposedly unknown animal actually composed from the misperception of known phenomena and which has never had any existence outside the human mind.

The purpose of this book is to examine aspects of those reinventions and rewritings, against the background of the Monster's waning fortunes. As such it moves on from my previous two books on the subject. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (1983) turned the orthodox story inside out and explained why there are no large unknown animals in the loch. *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* (2017) updated the arguments of the earlier book and re-examined the iconic evidence in the light of present-day knowledge.

I long ago lost interest in the prospect of the Loch Ness monster emerging from the depths as a zoological reality but I retain a keen interest in the literature and in the history and cultural significance of the legend. Nessie books now form a distinct non-fiction genre, with archetypal forms and interests. The genre is as disreputable and eccentric as maverick fringe genres always are, yet the Monster remains of interest for what it tells us about people, their belief systems, and how they perceive and imaginatively remake their worlds. Although some overlap is unavoidable, this new book endeavours to avoid repeating what my two earlier books covered and focuses instead on other angles and other material.

Part One of this book examines a diverse range of material about or relevant to the Monster which has not previously appeared in accounts of the Loch Ness story. Part Two scrutinises critical responses to *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* in the aftermath of its publication, by critics such as Adrian Shine and Henry H. Bauer, and examines its role in the evolving Loch Ness narrative. Part Three takes a fresh look at the Monster's origins in the light of the construction of Scottish identity and the cultural impact of the St Columba story on the Great Glen.

Part One: The Long Goodbye



1. Monster-watching at Loch Ness.

1

‘Monster! Prehistoric monster!’

The believers take the common elements in their story as tokens of verisimilitude, rather than as evidence that they have contrived their stories out of a shared culture and biology.

Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World* (1996)

‘There’s something strange on the radar screen!’ shouts a technician – but then the mystery object vanishes.

Several miles away an eye-witness gets a momentary glimpse of a large, unknown animal: ‘Monster! Prehistoric monster!’ But the witness dies.

A second person sights the animal and is brought back to base, babbling ‘The monster! It’s coming! Watch out! The monster! The monster!’

The surviving eye-witness is Nesbitt, a handsome young professor who is a radiation expert. He’s a scientist – a man not easily fooled. But as a man testifying to the existence of a monster Nesbitt is regarded as deluded. He is rushed to hospital, where the message is: *Get some rest*.

A psychiatrist is brought to Nesbitt’s bedside. The shrink is the archetypal sceptic. The psychiatrist tells Nesbitt that throughout the ages people have seen monsters. He smoothly explains that the monster which he thought he saw *does not exist*. Nesbitt is identified as suffering from ‘traumatic hallucination’. Monsters exist only in the mind.

But Nesbitt isn’t convinced. He *knows* what he saw. And in hospital

he reads the papers. Reports start to come in of ships being sunk. The survivors report seeing a sea-serpent. Nesbitt becomes convinced that these incidents involve the same monster which he witnessed. He goes to visit the world's foremost palaeontologist, to tell him he has seen a living dinosaur. But the expert is not persuaded. Everywhere Nesbitt goes he is met with scepticism. But one person is listening – the palaeontologist's beautiful assistant. She believes Nesbitt and shows him some pictures of dinosaurs. He goes through them, illustration after illustration. And there, finally, he sees it. A picture which is the spitting image of the monster he saw! A *Rhedosaurus!*

The top palaeontologist is won round to the likelihood of the dinosaur's existence as a living animal. He goes in search of monsters in a diving bell (the special effects here are curiously reminiscent of the first Nessie movie, *The Secret of the Loch*, released twenty-three years earlier). But the Rhedosaurus appears and smashes the diving bell, killing those inside.

The evidence that a huge, destructive mystery beast exists becomes overwhelming. It pops up in New York, where it proceeds to kill policemen, smash buildings and lift up automobiles with terrified people inside. It rampages through downtown Manhattan. But soon the military and our hero Nesbitt outwit the rampaging Rhedosaurus and kill it stone dead. Nesbitt gets the girl and order is restored. The End.

The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms is an entertaining yarn. The movie's title was obviously intended to stir memories of Jules Verne's classic adventure novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. The film was released in 1953. It cost $210,000 to make and grossed $5 million. A – so to speak – *phenomenal* success. A monster tale that hit the spot. Television had yet to devour the audience for movies and the public rushed to see the horrifying spectacle of a dinosaur ripping up New York.

The dinosaur is The Other, a frightening, violent, anarchic threat to America. In the age of the Cold War it might be perceived as a symbol of Soviet Russia. Or perhaps it is simply a representation of the awful consequences of atomic warfare. It's an atomic explosion which revives the Rhedosaurus from its long hibernation in the ice.

From the perspective of verisimilitude the movie is riddled with scientific errors. It can't even get the story of Galileo right. And the Rhedosaurus is an entirely fictional dinosaur – a type of Hollywood-adapted Tyrannosaurus Rex. But none of this really matters. The thrills

are what count, not the flimsy scaffolding of the story or its risible inconsistencies and science howlers.

By the standard of modern dinosaur thrillers the special effects of *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* are dated and disappointing, with a jerky, puppet-like monster. Its actions seem stiff and clumsy. Bizarrely, the dinosaur is prone to emitting loud roars, while at the same time it is an amphibian, managing to travel underwater despite lacking any limbs suitable for marine locomotion.

The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms was conceived in the wake of the commercial success of a re-release of that 1933 classic, *King Kong*. The cultural climate was once again favourable to thrilling movies about giant unknown animals. The following year *Them!* was released – a thriller about mutated giant ants. *Godzilla* soon followed. British cinema made its own contribution to the genre with *Behemoth, the Sea Monster* (1959) and *Gorgo* (1961).

Just as it is no coincidence that the Loch Ness Monster was born in the year of *King Kong*, it is significant that the revival of a faded, half-forgotten legend took place against a renewed social appetite for monsters. Constance Whyte's *More Than a Legend* appeared in 1957. Writing in that same year, James Thurber proclaimed Loch Ness 'one of the most famous places on earth'. But perhaps not in Hollywood. The error-strewn script of *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* makes reference to a famous monster loch in Scotland. It was not Loch Ness.

The context of *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* and *More Than a Legend* was that of the Cold War and the threat of atomic war. James Thurber located the Loch Ness mystery firmly in 'this ominous era of guided missiles'. His researcher Nora Sayre recalled that 'His interest in the Loch Ness Monster was mostly humorous' but the essay he ended up writing wasn't particularly amusing. She recalled that 'as I gathered all that material for him, I thought this simply isn't going to be funny enough'. Thurber's biographer calls it 'a rambling report on the Loch Ness monster'. The essay ends on a remarkably bleak note, with an apocalyptic vision of the possibility of atomic annihilation and a world without human beings. The Monster alone will survive: 'One far day another Nessie may rise to the sullen surface of the loch, scan the silent banks, and behold no living thing staring back at it – nothing, furred, or feathered, or wearing clothes'.

The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms repeated a trope from the orthodox

Loch Ness narrative. Just as causing an atomic explosion in the Arctic jerks the Rhedosaurus out of its long hibernation in the ice, animating its furious entry into the twentieth-century world, so it has long been argued that the Loch Ness Monster's sudden appearance and its energetic activities in 1933 were the consequence of rock being blasted during road building. 'Various persons are credited with the suggestion that masses of rock, dislodged by blast, hurtling down below the surface, may have disturbed the Monster, and driven it from its usual hiding places,' explained Constance Whyte.

The thought was also on Tim Dinsdale's mind. In 1960 he was sitting beside the loch when

> a sudden explosion shook the ground around me. A tremendous *thunderclap* of noise, which echoed back and forth between the walls of rock, in rolling peals of thunder; grumbling and muttering, far off into the distance.
>
> ... Without doubt, this was 'the din of blasting' which was said to have frightened the Monsters and brought them to the surface in the early 1930s with such remarkable frequency. Having now experienced the stunning effect of an explosion within the confines of this rocky place, and the echoes that followed on, I could well imagine there might be something in the theory. The shock must have been felt underwater for miles.

That there was indeed something in the theory was quickly established. The very next day Dinsdale filmed the Monster – 'a churning ring of rough water, centring about what appeared to be two long shadows, or shapes, rising and falling in the water!' Two days later he filmed it again: 'the extraordinary humped back of some huge living creature!'

Tim Dinsdale presents the reader with a report on his experiences. But the vividness of his prose is at odds with the film footage which purports to reinforce its accuracy. The footage of the first 'monster' to this day remains withheld from public view. The footage of the second 'monster' simply shows a distant, unidentifiable object of an uncertain shape.

In *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* the viewer shares the experience of each eye-witness, from a privileged perspective. The viewer witnesses the moment of revelation: the witness's cry of horrified disbelief,

followed by the awful recognition that there really *is* an enormous prehistoric dinosaur on the rampage. The viewer then participates in multiple individual eye-witness sightings, up to that moment when, in the fictional world, public recognition of the dinosaur's reality endorses both its existence and the social threat it represents. In the course of that journey there is the satisfying drama of the hero's lonely struggle against sceptics, who are incarnated as authority figures representing common sense and managerial expertise. The viewer *knows* that the sceptics are wrong and that the folly of their complacent doubt will have deleterious consequences.

This is the template of innumerable novels and movies. Those who believe in monsters, or ghosts, or vampires, are ignored and marginalised, but the lonely believer is always right, the sceptics always wrong. The thrill of dramatic narrative requires no less.

In the real world the problem, of course, is that there is no way of objectively judging the reliability of an eye-witness report. This is where non-fiction books about monsters part company from movies and novels. 'As a report,' Constance Whyte explained in her Author's Note at the beginning of *More Than a Legend*, 'the book's value depends largely on eye-witness accounts.' In that sense it simply replicated Rupert Gould's *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, which was also largely a compilation of eye-witness accounts. But as I pointed out in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, 'No-one has been able to film what eye-witnesses claim they see. This paradox lies at the heart of the Loch Ness mystery.'

Take the case of B.A. Russell, described as 'the Fort Augustus schoolmaster'. He described how at 10.10am on Sunday 1 October 1933 he was on the hillside north of the entrance to the River Oich and the Caledonian Canal.

> On reaching a high rocky point about 300 yards from the water's edge I saw a huge neck and head extended from the water about 800-900 yards, from where I was standing and about 400 yards from the water's edge. The creature was moving slowly and steadily towards the southwest, that is, at right angles from left to right across my line of sight. Its progress continued, more or less in a straight line, for twelve minutes (timed), after which it sank almost exactly half a mile from the point at which I had first seen it.
>
> Conditions for observation were, as nearly as may be, perfect. The

> loch was dead calm and the water pale grey. There was no shimmer or glare from the water. The sun was shining from behind and to the right of the creature so that head and neck were visible as a dark silhouette against the pale water.

This is a classic sighting, enshrined as such by both Rupert Gould, who interviewed Russell, and Constance Whyte. Gould was thrilled to find in it an endorsement of his belief in sea-serpents:

> I noted the resemblance, in detail, between his account and Captain Cringle's description (and sketch) of the creature seen from the S.S. *Umfuli*, in the South Atlantic, in 1893; and I ascertained that Mr Russell, at the date (October 1 1933) when he saw the 'monster,' had never heard of Captain Cringle's very similar experience.

This remark of Gould's is a classic instance of an author tailoring the material to suit a theory. Captain Cringle's sea monster did *not* resemble Mr Russell's. Cringle's monster had a head and neck fifteen feet in length; Russell's was only a third that length. Cringle's monster had a body 'which exhibited three distinct humps'; Russell's had no body at all. Cringle's monster was massive and looked 'like a hundred-ton gun partially submerged'; Russell supplied no simile but 'The head was not much larger than the neck' and the profile is, arguably, bird-like. Cringle's monster 'was rushing through the water at great speed, and was throwing water from its breast as a vessel throws water from its bows'; Russell's 'swam slowly' creating only 'A V-shaped ripple'. Cringle's monster was 'dark brown in colour'; Russell's was 'dark' but the colouration was 'indefinite'. Cringle's monster 'dipped its head under water several times, sending the spray flying in all directions'; Russell's only ever turned its head 'from side to side'. Cringle could see his monster's eyes 'and the jaws, which occasionally opened', exposing what appeared to be teeth; Russell 'saw no appendages to the head, and no eyes, etc.' Cringle's monster was visible 'for over half an hour' and was still churning its way across the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Portugal, when it vanished into the darkness as evening came on; Russell's sank vertically after 12 minutes and disappeared from sight.

Gould contacted both men, who supplied him with sketches. He then 'improved' them with his own superior draughtsmanship. In Russell's

case three different drawings of his monster were published – in the *Times*, in the *Illustrated London News* and in *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*. Whether or not either of the first two reproduced 'a drawing by Mr Russell, made soon after the event' is unclear. By the sound of it there were four versions in circulation by 1934. Constance Whyte added another in 1957, although she, like Gould, preferred to re-draw Russell's version rather than simply reproduce it. She captioned her version 'The Loch Ness Monster, from a sketch at the Abbey, Fort Augustus', suggesting that this is where Russell's original drawing (now apparently lost) was archived.

Perhaps the most striking anomaly is the difference between Gould's own drawings of these two classic sightings. The head and neck in the Cringle sighting is held rigid and entirely linear; in the Russell sighting the head curls over and faces down.

The other crucial difference is that the monster which passed by the *Umfuli* had multiple witnesses, whereas B.A. Russell was alone. Captain Cringle informed Gould that the monster was about 400 yards away when first seen and in view of the thickness of the body supporting the neck 'I should not, therefore, call it a serpent'. However, the ship's mate, C.A.W. Powell, recorded the monster as being 'about 500 yards from the ship' and described it as 'a Monster Fish of the Serpent shape, about 80 ft. long with slimy skin and short fins at about 20 feet apart on the back'. He also believed 'There were two of them in company.' This last detail was subsequently crossed out in the ship's log.

The differences in perception between two experienced mariners is telling, as is Gould's only partial reproduction of Captain Cringle's letter. When monster authors use ellipses the sceptic will always wonder what material is being left out, and why. Gould himself was unperturbed by the deletion of this last part of Powell's account, blandly explaining that 'I imagine that Mr Powell was, temporarily, under the impression that he saw two of the creatures together; and then, considering that he had been misled by spray or other appearances, erased that portion of his entry.'

Eighty-five years later B.A. Russell's sighting is still being touted as irrefutable evidence for a Loch Ness Monster. To a believer this is as good as it gets – a lengthy sighting of a mystery long-necked animal of a size much greater than that of any species known to inhabit the loch.

From a sceptical perspective there are the usual problems with a

sighting like this. The eye-witness was alone, without a camera. No one else saw this Monster, even though it was calmly cruising towards the occupied part of Fort Augustus on a Sunday morning, in full view of the Abbey buildings. The eye-witness was observing the creature from a considerable distance, without the aid of binoculars. The witness was staring into the sun, which meant that the object was in silhouette. The loch was flat calm, in other words like a mirror, with all that implies for reflection, distortion and magnification. Even a duck's wake can seem massive in such conditions.

What is striking about Russell's various eye-witness statements is his absolute confidence about measurements. The Monster was 800-900 yards away. Its head and neck were five feet in height. It travelled half a mile before disappearing. The episode lasted twelve minutes. Russell was emphatic about these facts:

> I should add that all measurements of distance have been checked, so far as possible, from the O.S. 6in. map, that my estimate of the creature's head is based on a comparison with the height of a man standing in a skiff and that the period during which I actually watched the head and neck was timed accurately.

A brief experience is encased in a scaffolding of certitude. But it is impossible to share the witness's absolute conviction. Assessments of distance and size are highly subjective in such an environment. Where distance is concerned there was a 20 per cent difference of opinion between even experienced mariners such as Captain Cringle and Mr Powell at relatively short range. And of course with each remembering and each re-telling that raw experience becomes further shaped and smoothed into a narrative.

Russell described how 'Birds could be seen wheeling and flying low' over the Monster. This is exactly how some birds react to a seal at the surface (fish predators do not enjoy serious competition). Perhaps a contemporary sceptic suggested this as an explanation. But in the version of the sighting which appears in Rupert Gould's book the account is armour-plated against scepticism: 'Previously, Mr Russell had been of the opinion that some creature – probably a big seal – had strayed into Loch Ness; but he had never expected to see anything so remarkable as this.'

Russell not only insisted that his sighting was accurate in every respect; he also took up the cudgels on behalf of other witnesses:

> As to the identity of this strange inhabitant of the loch the only thing of which I am satisfied is that none of the 'explanations' which I have I seen in the Press – they range from killer whales to logs of wood and from walruses to masses of peat – seems to me to satisfy the descriptions given by scores of witnesses whose integrity and credibility are beyond question. And to my mind not the least noteworthy fact connected with it is that, so far as I know, not one of those 'explanations' or 'identifications' comes from a person who has been sufficiently fortunate to have had an opportunity of personal observation of the creature in question.

In other words, seeing is believing. It is an argument reiterated some three decades later by Tim Dinsdale, who also asserted that he had coolly and calmly seen and filmed a monster, which could not possibly have been a boat. Dinsdale too was keen to bolster the authenticity of his sightings by using size comparisons with known objects. But as I have argued elsewhere, the absolute certainty of a witness is demonstrably no guide to the reality of what they saw.

Believers treat eye-witness descriptions as verbal photographs, exact in their particulars. In the case of the Russell sighting both Rupert Gould and Constance Whyte reinforced it by supplying illustrations of what Russell is supposed to have seen. But these illustrations are grossly misleading because they don't show what Russell actually saw. What they portray is the serpentine head and neck of the Monster cutting through the water at close range at surface level. Russell was vastly further away and viewing the loch at a downward facing angle from the hillside one-hundred feet above its surface. The illustrations used in *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* and *More Than a Legend* are what Russell imagined he saw, not what he actually saw.

Reviving this sighting as a classic in 2018, Roland Watson further muddies the waters by failing to appreciate exactly where Russell was when he had his sighting. His map puts Russell north of Inchnacardoch Bay and north of the main A82 road. This is simply wrong. Russell's position is precisely shown on page 48 of Gould's book. Watson similarly gets the monster's location wrong. This is important because Russell's

'monster' was much more visible to the residents of Fort Augustus than is indicated on Watson's misleading map. It also raises the question as to why Russell did not seek to get closer to his monster by descending the hillside. Finally, it is noteworthy that Russell's 'monster' pursues a course that brings it to the same location as Alex Campbell's notorious 'cormorants' monster. Because he has got the location wrong, Watson erroneously dismisses such possibilities.

> My guess is he was high up on the equivalent of a Great Glen Walk path with a forest between him and the loch. Gould's book adds any attempt to get closer would have brought Russell into 'dead ground' from which his view would have been obscured.
>
> Campbell's sighting was from his home in Fort Augustus over a mile away.

In fact Russell was relatively close to Campbell's house. He was also close to his own house and to that of Commander Meiklem – one of Rupert Gould's star witnesses (and a fellow Royal Navy man). In view of the length of time involved Russell had time to alert others to the monster's manifestation at the surface. He even had time to run home and get his telescope, or a camera if he owned one.

He did none of these things. This is perfectly understandable. Glimpsing a gigantic unknown animal in Loch Ness who would not be thrilled, paralysed with excitement and not want to do anything but stare? But Russell was keen to present himself as a cool and calm observer. When he first saw the monster he apparently checked the time on his watch. When it descended he again checked the time. Tim Dinsdale represented himself in similar terms. On the morning of 23 April 1960 he was, according to his own account, cool, calm, collected and perfectly familiar with the appearance of boats on Loch Ness.

Context is everything where the Loch Ness story is concerned. No evidence should ever be considered in isolation. B.A. Russell's encounter with the Loch Ness Monster on 1 October 1933 was preceded by other memorable episodes. In fact, September 1933 was a very good month for Monster sightings. Mr and Mrs McSkimming, residents of Fort Augustus, were on the road near Commander Meiklem's house when they spotted a large brown hump thirty feet long some three-quarters of a mile eastward of Cherry Island. At around 11am on 22 September a group of

four women saw the Monster from the Half-Way House tea-room at Altsigh. It was half-way across the loch and had the appearance of 'a mythical creature'. It raised its head and neck 'almost vertically out of the water' and was 'almost continuously in view for over a quarter of an hour'. Later that day, at 2pm, Mr Donald Morrison of Wuhu and four other witnesses, including Miss Gracey ('an American lady') saw the Monster from Balnafoich, a house overlooking the loch near Dores. They enjoyed a sighting lasting four minutes. The Monster resembled 'a huge caterpillar' and swam past the five witnesses, heading for Fort Augustus. Mr Morrison supplied Rupert Gould with a sketch, which duly appeared in *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*. Misleadingly titled 'Mr Morrison's sketch' (it was actually Gould's adaptation of Morrison's drawing) it showed a monster thirty feet long, with a head and neck five feet high, followed by six humps. In fact, Morrison told Gould there were 'about seven humps' but the latter chose, rather strangely, to identify the head and neck as the first hump. Morrison described the head and neck as 'snake-like' and 'similar to an adder and tapering'.

Finally, at the end of September (date unspecified), the Fort Augustus postman, James Cameron, reported his second sighting of the beast. He was standing on the promontory by the Fort Augustus railway station and pier when he saw the Monster moving out of Inchnacardoch Bay into the loch. He had it in view for about ten minutes. At its nearest it was just 250 yards away. He saw three humps with a total length of about 14 feet. The Monster rose and sank slightly as it progressed and resembled 'a great tadpole'.

And then, perhaps the very next day, B.A. Russell saw his Monster.

In short, the context of Russell's sighting was an atmosphere of mounting frenzy at Loch Ness. On 20 September the *Inverness Courier* endorsed as fact the presence in the loch of 'some abnormally large creature'. As far as this sober publication was concerned 'The Loch Ness Mystery' was real. Then, just two days later, there was a double sighting of a monster with a long neck – at 11am opposite Altsigh and at 2pm near Dores. To a believer all this amounts to a ringing endorsement of the animal's existence. From a sceptical perspective it simply amounts to a catalogue of expectant attention and misperception: a boat (the McSkimmings), a seal (the Altsigh sighting), a boat wake (Dores) and another boat wake (James Cameron). B.A. Russell's sighting, influenced by those other ones, was no different. We'll never know what he saw that

day, although it was probably either a seal or a cormorant.

The believer, of course, will object that these mundane explanations cannot possibly account for the reality of the eye-witness descriptions. This is true, but that line of argument requires an acceptance of the accuracy of those descriptions. Some of those 'monsters' were seen at extreme range, human perception and eye-witness accounts are notoriously fallible, and memory works to shape and smooth and imaginatively rewrite experience. The problem remains. No one has managed to photograph or film any of those 'monsters' in Rupert Gould's mouth-watering illustrations.

What's more, the colourful behaviour of Nessie in that first golden age of monster mania was never repeated. In the eighty-five years which have passed since B.A. Russell's twelve-minute sighting Nessie has failed to repeat her display of a five-feet-long neck for anyone at the lochside with a camera. In June 1951 Mr J. Harper-Smith, O.B.E., L.L.B., Town Clerk of Lincoln, described how he and his adult son had seen the Monster swimming at the loch surface for fifteen minutes: it displayed 'a large black head with a considerable length of neck below it'. But the only image of a long-necked monster to emerge from decades of sightings was the hoax photograph attributed to R. K. Wilson. What is revealing about that episode is how afterwards witnesses said that the monster they'd seen exactly resembled that ostensibly genuine picture. Margaret Munro, who observed the Monster for 25 minutes as it lay on a remote beach, was reported as saying that the head and neck were 'exactly like those portrayed in the London surgeon's photograph'. Soon after that image first appeared in the *Daily Mail* there was another sighting by multiple witnesses: 'It came up quite close to the shore, and the witnesses agree that the head and neck were almost identical with those shown in the photographs' ('Loch Ness "Monster" Seen Again', *Aberdeen Journal*, 5 May 1934). Three days later the *Inverness Courier* reported a sensational sighting by Kenneth Cameron, master builder. He watched the Monster for 20 minutes and reported that it was 'exactly like' the Surgeon's photograph. About this time James Maciver also reported a sighting:

> Asked if he could describe what he had seen, Mr Maciver said what impressed him first was that the head of the Monster was exactly like what was shown in the photograph recently taken by a London surgeon.

J. Harper-Smith, for his part, was convinced that the object he saw 'was very similar to some of the prehistoric monsters depicted for example in Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*'. In this latter case the witness saw something at long range (estimated to be anything from 800 yards to one mile away, at 9pm on a June evening). Estimates of distance and size are inevitably subjective, especially when made in poor lighting conditions and from surface level like Harper-Smith in his boat.

With eye-witness evidence there is always the problem of human perception:

> Our vision is more elaborate than our Polaroids. The retina converts light through the eye's lens into impulses transmitted by the optic nerves, which partially cross over at the base of the brain. We see by our optic cortex, in the back of our heads. More complicated still, the inner parts of both retinas register on the opposite side of the brain, from the outer parts on the same side… The brain affects our sight like a computer intervening between camera lens and film. The sensation from the eye selects an hypothesis from the mind to fit the object seen, like a busy barmaid selecting the right drink from half-heard orders in a crowded pub. This is useful for inferring the characteristics of things we observe only bits of… Likely objects are thus created by the brain – even the most sober and intelligent brains – regardless of their real existence.
>
> Heed a moment a neuropsychologist.
>
> 'The experimentally elusive, but nevertheless vital feature of perception, is that it *goes beyond the available sensory evidence*… Illusions are important as *phenomena of perception*…these can be specific phenomena of perception which, though generated by brains, are not part of the physical world of objects.'

But no one can doubt the strength of Harper-Smith's conviction. Seven years later he retold his sighting on a BBC television programme, 'The Legend of the Loch'. But as Bernard Crick once cautioned, 'Reminiscences must be read as stories: they are not a superior form of truth, because memory can expand, if worked too hard, as well as contract, if not exercised.'

When she dragged the Loch Ness Monster back into the limelight in 1957, Constance Whyte revived the early 'classic' sightings and added some new ones which had come to her attention.

Since a solitary eye-witness's experience cannot be objectively replicated, in order to persuade the reader of its veracity special pleading is required. This often takes the form of asserting the respectability and high social status of the witness or their impressive educational qualifications. Rupert Gould let his readers know that the monster observed on 1 October 1933 was seen by 'B. A. Russell M.A.' Sometimes additional pleas are entered. The thrust of this imperative often verges on comic irrelevance. Marjorie Moir described how she and her companions saw a 30-feet-long monster. To buttress its solidity Constance Whyte added: 'It may be mentioned that Mrs Moir has travelled widely and spent some years in the Falkland Islands where her husband was Medical Officer.' Tim Dinsdale felt that it was sufficient to inform his readers that in mid-October 1964 the monster's head and neck (no details) had been sighted off Dores (no precise location identified) by an unnamed 'Lady of unimpeachable integrity'.

At its most basic, the reader is assured that the witness is of impeccable character. For example, Arthur Grant, aged twenty-one, stated that while riding his motorbike along the north shore road on 5 January 1934, at one o'clock in the morning, he saw a large animal cross the road ahead of him. In fact, he was so close to the animal that he almost hit it. The scene was bathed in bright moonlight. The strange creature crossed the road 'in two great bounds':

> it had a long neck and large oval-shaped eyes on the top of a small head. The tail would be from 5 to 6 feet long and very powerful; the curious thing about it was that the end was rounded off; it did not come to a point. The total length of the animal would be 15 to 20 feet.

Constance Whyte accepted this story as entirely accurate because of the calibre of the witness:

> I know this witness and his family; by virtue of his occupation, professional training and character, he is one on whose word and powers of observation particular reliance can be placed.

The difficulty is that it is impossible to share Mrs Whyte's serene confidence. Grant may simply have been playing a light-hearted prank which quickly spiralled out of control. He was obliged to supply a report to the Scottish Veterinary Society in Edinburgh (which was presumably Not Amused by the affair). Even the local police seem to have become involved and required a statement.

Rupert Gould revealed that 'A rumour reached me, from more than quarter, that the story was a mere hoax.' Gould, very liberally, asserted that he was convinced such accusations were 'utterly groundless'. But he had no real way of knowing. He never met Grant and communicated with him only by letter. Eighty-one years later an anecdote emerged of a local garage owner, Alec Menzies, who had heard Grant using the public telephone there in the aftermath of his sighting and saying, 'They've swallowed it!' The clear implication was that the episode was a practical joke.

Rupert Gould was unenthusiastic about endorsing Grant's land sighting on the peculiarly idiosyncratic grounds that the size of the animal was too small for it to have been the monster. Either Grant had underestimated the size of the creature, he believed, or it was not the monster at all. Gould was convinced, on the basis of other eye-witness reports, that the Monster had 'a probable length of 45 feet or so', with a neck 'at least 6 feet long, with a diameter of about a foot, being slightly tapered towards the head'. But if Grant's animal wasn't the monster Gould could 'offer no suggestions as to what it really was'.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved suggested that Grant's sighting was entirely consistent with that of an otter, apart from the exaggeration of size. Another possibility, proposed by Darren Naish, is that Grant encountered a seal.

Arthur Grant is presumably now dead and it seems unlikely that we will ever know whether the episode was real or invented. He remains a figure of myth, along with all the other classic witnesses.

The Monster's life support system depends from time to time on hoaxes to keep the creature in the public eye and to maintain the enthusiasm of believers. It is telling that from the frenzy of 1933-34 only two classic pictures emerged, those of Hugh Gray and R. K. Wilson. Both were undoubtedly fraudulent, as was the next one to become enshrined in monster lore, Lachlan Stuart's three humps at dawn, 1951. When no one

can photograph what eye-witnesses claim to see there are always pranksters happy to fill that missing imaginative space.

How many sightings are also hoaxes is impossible to say. Very few, probably. But it is a fact that those who write about the Monster are all too willing to accept sightings received in the form of unsolicited communications from individuals who they never meet to interrogate in person. Rupert Gould, to his credit, did his best to meet witnesses face to face. But some slipped the net, including Hugh Gray, R. K. Wilson and Arthur Grant. Gould did not even succeed in corresponding with Hugh Gray, which would seem to indicate evasiveness on Gray's part rather than lack of curiosity on Gould's. And if Gould had never met Mrs Spicer and questioned her separately from her husband we would probably never have had his subsequent retraction of his former confidence in their land sighting. She was a more sober witness, asserting that the Monster was 'about 200 yards ahead' when first seen and remarking that 'On the upper side of the body, at the point where the neck began, she saw something which she took to be the head and neck of some smaller animal – for example, a young deer'. It was surely this last remark which sowed the doubts in Gould's mind about this strange episode. The more detail that becomes available about a sighting, the more it can be tested. Two viewpoints are always more valuable than one but the Loch Ness saga rests largely on individual testimony. Even on those occasions when there are two or more witnesses, it is conventionally the case that only one person supplies the testimony.

Hoaxes continue to underline the need for regular injections of the marvellous. On 27 February 2016 Roland Watson's blog reported 'An Extraordinary Nessie Story from 1990'. It described in mesmerising detail the sudden, wholly unexpected appearance of the Monster before a couple who had stopped at the lochside between Foyers and Dores a quarter of a century ago:

> A very dark grey but not quite black back of an animal was sticking up from the water, no more that 20 yards away. It was side on and between 20 and 25 feet long, and about 4 feet out of the water at the highest point.
>
> The back had quite an angular hump to it in one place, towards the right. For about 20 seconds we both watched, mesmerised. We could

> clearly see the skin texture which was similar to an elephant's but shinier. We could see muscular movements, but not like a breathing motion. Then suddenly a neck and head rose up out of the water at the right end of the body, the same end as the above mentioned hump. Remember, this was at a distance an adult human could cover in 20 paces!

The account was accompanied by seven remarkable sketches made by the couple soon afterwards. Watson asserted that 'Sceptical readers will declare it fake as there is no other explanation available in their repertoire.' This was a reasonable observation since such a detailed close-up description could hardly be explained as a misperceived seal or deer. A single person with a drug habit or mental health issues might conceivably hallucinate such a sighting but not two people. Watson noted that 'The account is consistent with other claimed sightings and in that respect it is of great interest.'

One of Watson's readers commented:

> It's sightings such as this that keeps me open-minded to the possibility that there's something really strange in Loch Ness. I can't come up with a rational explanation for what these folks claimed to have seen. Either they saw what they said they saw, or they're telling a tall tale. But why tell a tall tale 26 years after the fact? And insist on anonymity? These folks are certainly not publicity seekers.

In fact, some months later Watson silently deleted this blog post, along with all the comments it had generated. He never acknowledged or explained why but evidently he'd discovered that this remarkable story was, after all, a hoax. But this was not the end of Watson's fascination with anonymous anecdotes. Some eleven months later, on 25 January 2017, his blog carried another 'Previously Unpublished Monster Sighting', this one allegedly from approximately fifteen years earlier. It occurred on the road to Inverness, a little beyond Temple Pier.

> As we came round the bend I couldn't believe my eyes as there was a huge hump about 3 to 4 foot high. It reminded me of a huge chocolate brazil if you understand what I mean by the shape of it and a ridge running right the way down it. It looked mottled but I don't think it was rough just appeared so because of the mottling.

> I am not sure I will be believed because it was so close inshore, feet rather than yards. I had only just come round the bend and was worried if I stopped that a car may come round and hit me but slowed down and we had a very good look at it. I drove until I came to a layby and waited for a long time but saw nothing more. I have no idea how deep the water is there but it was definitely not a bird, log or seal. It was enormous.

The witness supplied a sketch, which is strikingly similar to the one which appears in Rupert Gould's book illustrating Commander Meiklem's sighting of a monster between Cherry Island and the shore.

A few months later, on 5 June 2017, Watson's blog supplied a report of yet another anonymous sighting, this one supposedly from 2006.

> I can't really judge size on water, it's not my speciality, but it was HUGE. It looked like a whale. I would say it was grey like an elephant with a neck that was swinging side to side over the water. That was really what it looked like, an elephant waving its trunk. There was a huge commotion in the water behind it. The thing was just massive. It was swimming back toward Inverness the way we came.
>
> My girlfriend was fumbling to get her camera out of luggage in the back seat before the monster was gone. She was tipsy and we were both shaking. She finally got it out of her bag and took a picture through the car window. We were so shaken up that neither of us thought to roll down the window. She tried to take another snap but her memory card was full, and as she fumbled to delete sightseeing pictures to make more room, it was gone. It just sort of went down while it continued swimming toward Inverness.

Watson supplied a sketch, since the owner of the photograph claimed that copyright belonged to his former girlfriend, with whom he'd lost touch. But some ten months later there was good news. On 23 April 2018 Watson was able to reproduce it, explaining 'I am now happy to say he has obtained her consent and the photo is now included in this article.' This provoked a lively commentary and the intervention of legendary monster hunter Steve Feltham. The anonymous eye-witness claimed that his girlfriend had taken the photograph from inside the car, parked in a

lay-by near the Clansman Hotel. Feltham's investigation was able to establish that the image was obtained elsewhere. He tracked down the site of the photograph to Ness Side Cottage, a holiday rental. Feltham concluded that the 'monster' was actually something smeared on one of the windows of this house, superimposed over a boat passing down the loch leaving a very distinct wake. Months later Watson was still insisting that this obvious fake was 'the real deal' and asking 'why the best images are often the most rejected'. It demonstrated a characteristic suspension of any critical faculty, with blind faith buttressing even the most transparently fraudulent 'evidence'.

Feltham's analysis is persuasive. It reinforces the case against the anonymous eye-witness's dubious testimony, which bears some curious similarities to Watson's deleted 27 February 2016 blog post of 'An Extraordinary Nessie Story from 1990'. In that account the hoaxer claimed he'd stayed silent at the time for fear of being 'professionally compromised if we went public'. The hoaxer in Watson's blog post of 5 June 2017 also claimed a need to remain anonymous because he worked 'in a field involving considerable professional scrutiny'. The eye-witness in this latter episode claims to be American but his language is distinctly un-American. Americans don't say 'shop', they say 'store'. An American would write 'specialty' not 'speciality'. No American would spell 'realized' with an 's'. I'm also struck by the similarities with that other anonymous eye-witness, who reported a 'Brazil nut' monster. That witness, supposedly female, described how 'my husband said there is something in the water' – phrasing curiously like the supposed American witness, who wrote how 'we saw something in the water… my girlfriend began exclaiming that "there's something in the water"'. The 'Brazil nut' witness writes: 'whatever the animal is it's huge. The 'American' witness writes: 'it was HUGE'. It seems perfectly possible that these three anonymous eye-witness statements are all the work of the same solitary prankster.

So much of the Loch Ness story depends on second-hand eye-witness evidence which is never tested. Watson's three anonymous witnesses bring to mind the case of Norah Atkinson. She described how she was admiring the loch's beauty near Dores while her husband fitted the spare tyre after they'd had a puncture.

> Suddenly, there was a terrific upheaval of water and up came a long swan-like neck with a small head. Then the whole body appeared,

> elephant grey in colour, two humps and very long and powerful. All I managed to say to my husband was 'Hurry, hurry'. We could hardly believe our eyes. We both watched until it disappeared underneath the water just below the edge of the bank. What a terrifying sight it was, and one I shall remember for the rest of my life. Goodness knows what else the Loch holds. The very thought of it makes me turn cold.

This sighting is recorded in *The Elusive Monster*. In the context of that book it was plainly very influential in keeping the possibility of a Loch Ness Monster alive in its author's attitude to the phenomenon. Maurice Burton believed he had explained away many Monster sightings, with his gas-propelled vegetable mat theory providing the key to those sightings of a monster which moved at speed, created great surface turbulence and then sank vertically from sight. But there was a troubling residue of evidence which provided a barrier to an all-embracing scepticism. Burton was happy to diagnose Greta Finlay's sinister Monster as a roe deer with antlers 'in velvet' (i.e. undeveloped). But Norah Atkinson's Monster did not lend itself so easily to a naturalistic explanation. Burton's submission to this sighting underlines how the eye-witness evidence always exerts a hypnotic grip. It would be another 22 years before a book appeared which argued flatly that the Monster did not exist and that *all* the supposed 'evidence' could be dismissed.

Burton contacted Norah Atkinson twice more, trying to prise more detail from her. Alas, he reported that he was 'disappointed not to get any further details'. Mrs Atkinson told him that she had told him 'all she could remember'. She added that what had impressed her was 'the sudden appearance of the head and neck, the two humps, and the speed with which it moved'.

Burton was plainly troubled by this sighting. As he acknowledged:

> There could be little chance of Mrs Atkinson having been deceived by wave-effects, otters, seals, a flight of birds, or even a vegetable mat, when she saw the object at such close range, 'just below the edge of the bank.'

But once again context is everything. Mrs Atkinson's sighting was contained in a letter which she sent to Maurice Burton in the summer of 1959. At this time he was a leading advocate for the Monster, along with

Constance Whyte. Atkinson's letter described a sighting which had occurred 'in early August 1946'. The passage of thirteen years did not seem to trouble Burton, whereas he considered it a possible 'factor for error' that two days had elapsed before Greta Finlay described her encounter with the Monster to Constance Whyte: 'her memory of a confused situation had time to grow dim, the visual impression she had carried away could have become distorted'. Greta Finlay's Monster had unnerved her. She was 'aghast' to see it no more than 20 yards away; the head had a 'hideous appearance'. Her account was contained in *More Than a Legend*, published in 1957, with a second impression in 1958. Norah Atkinson may or may not have read the book; it seems hard to believe she wasn't aware of the Surgeon's photograph. Her description of the Monster's 'long swan-like neck with a small head' exactly matches that of the object in that legendary 1934 image. That photograph either coloured her impression of whatever it was she witnessed, or, alternatively, her eye-witness statement may simply be a hoax. Maurice Burton wrote:

> I regard this letter as important for several reasons. First, it was sent to me unsolicited. Secondly, its simplicity and lack of detail give it an air of being genuine.

These can only be regarded as very naïve lines of argument. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that 'Norah Atkinson' was a leg-puller. That her 'Monster' was an identikit 'Surgeon's Monster' inevitably casts suspicion on its veracity. It would have been useful to have Mr Atkinson's account of the Monster – assuming he even existed. Maurice Burton must have accumulated quite an archive of material about the Loch Ness Monster over the years but if it still exists it remains unknown. As so often in the Loch Ness story, the narrative is inconclusive. Loose endings are everywhere. In the end all one can say about a sighting like Norah Atkinson's is that it is worthless as evidence. There are too many unanswered questions.

With the passage of time it has become clear that, very often, the more you know about the personality of a witness the less plausible their sighting becomes. Ted Holiday, who saw ghosts and UFOs as well as monsters, supplies a prime example. It is also the case that the more the witness talks about their sighting, or the more another witness gives their

version, the more the evidence starts to fray at the edges. Mrs Spicer, with her chance remark about a deer, was the one who ultimately undermined the credibility of her husband's testimony in Rupert Gould's eyes.

Marjorie Moir's Monster sighting is enshrined as a classic, first memorialised by Constance Whyte. But two rather significant aspects of this episode do not appear in the tale as it is told in *More Than a Legend*. Buried away in the files of the *Aberdeen Journal* (26 October 1936) is the revelation that 'It was getting dark and the water was rough' – conditions which add to all the other difficulties associated with this sighting. And gathering dust in the files of the *Dundee Courier* (26 October 1936) is an even more astonishing revelation. Mrs Moir revealed that 'when they left the monster was still there. They had watched it for over a quarter of an hour.' They had a sensational sighting of the Monster but they had to be on their way and left it there, displaying its remarkable body! That aspect of this classic sighting is missing from all the monster books. Had it been included a reader's response might well have been critical rather than accepting.

It is also noteworthy that the similes and comparisons tend to change with each re-telling by the witness. Mr Spicer's Monster was like a dragon, a prehistoric monster and a huge snail; it was carrying a lamb or, on second thoughts, an otter, or perhaps, thinking about it, displaying the end of its tail. Tim Dinsdale's Monster had a back like an underfed horse until he changed it to a back like an African water buffalo. Margaret Munro's Monster, seen just weeks after publication of the Surgeon's photograph created a sensation, saw a 'giraffe-like neck and absurdly small head'; it was 'exactly like' the Surgeon's Monster. Two years later Malcolm Irvine said he'd had a conversation with Margaret Munro and she'd told him her Monster was as long as one of the local steamers – no less than 50 feet. Irvine himself had the good fortune to see and film the Monster twice. His rediscovered 1936 movie film, shot at close range, shows a substantial but irregular object moving from right to left in front of his camera, and then from left to right. It is plainly not an otter or a seal or a group of birds; on the other hand it bears no resemblance to the smooth, humped, long-necked animal reported by Loch Ness eye-witnesses. The film vanished from sight between 1936 and 2001, when it was shown on TV; a frame from the film was published in *More Than a Legend* and today it can be viewed online in its original newsreel format. It is almost certainly a hoax involving something such as a tree trunk

being dragged along behind a boat. That the Monster turned round and came back across Irvine's viewpoint indicates the kind of good fortune which no other monster watcher equipped with a movie camera has ever been blessed with. Irvine's earlier Nessie footage consisted of 'a short film secured off Inverfarigaig on December 12, 1933, at a range of some 100 yards'. A frame is reproduced in Rupert Gould's book. It bears a strong resemblance to the 1936 film, although the object being towed appears slightly smaller. The bow waves from the boat towing the object can plainly be seen in the foreground of the image, showing beyond any doubt that Irvine's 'Monster' was staged. Irvine himself seems to have dropped quickly out of sight. The obscurity of both the film and its maker ensured that there was little or no discussion of it in the classic monster books. The final curiosity is that Gould's book contains no interviews or correspondence with the three individuals who claimed to have seen and photographed the Monster at relatively close range. The obvious conclusion is that R. K. Wilson, Hugh Gray and Malcolm Irvine were reluctant to enter into communication with an inquisitor like Rupert Gould. The reason why they wouldn't wish to is starkly obvious.

A frame from Irvine's 1936 Monster film was used in *More Than a Legend* but Constance Whyte has nothing to say about it, or about the circumstances of the film-maker's remarkable close encounter.

Books which assert that the Loch Ness Monster exists all have soft centres: the eye-witness evidence. This was what persuaded Rupert Gould, Constance Whyte and even Maurice Burton. 'The witnesses, almost without exception, impressed me very much indeed,' reported Gould. Quantity is assumed to dictate quality and around this mass of fluid material a narrative scaffolding is placed. But the scaffolding is often as shaky as the eye-witness evidence it aims to bolster.

James Thurber's essay on the Monster asserted that 'By 1936 there was a heavy tangle of traffic from dawn to dusk along the more than sixty miles of new motor roads that encircle the loch.' But there were no such roads. The south shore road wasn't modernised at all and did not run alongside Loch Ness between Foyers and Fort Augustus. Apart from where it moved inland at Invermoriston and Drumnadrochit, the modernised north shore road hugged the shoreline along the loch's twenty-two mile length. It's also highly unlikely that the lochside was jammed with Monster spotters in 1936. Monster mania peaked in 1934.

Thereafter the Monster went into a decline. Rupert Gould's Monster book was one of his less successful titles and it was not reprinted in his lifetime.

The mythology of a new road opening up Loch Ness to outside visitors derived entirely from Englishwoman Constance Whyte's ignorance of local history. 'Before the year 1933 no motor road existed beside Loch Ness,' she wrote in *More Than a Legend*. This was bunkum, but it has been echoed by gullible believers from Tim Dinsdale in 1961 to Adrian Shine in 1983 to Nick Redfern and Karl Shuker in 2016.

In fact prior to 1933 seventy-five per cent of the loch had a motor road running beside it, following the same routes that still exist today. In the words of one historian, 'Today most traffic uses the northerly lakeside road, built by the commissioners.' The reference is to the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges, who were appointed in 1803 and who proceeded to build a strategic network of new roads across northern Scotland, including one along the north shore of Loch Ness.

Mrs Whyte's error was of longstanding. In 1949 she produced her first publication on the Monster for a privately circulated magazine, which she expanded as an article published in *King's College Hospital Gazette* in July 1950. This was then republished as a pamphlet. In it she wrote: 'During that year [1933] and the following three, a magnificent motor road was constructed and cars and buses raced along it'.

In fact, the roadworks at Loch Ness simply formed part of the reconstruction of the main Glasgow-Inverness road. These works began in March 1930 and the project was completed in 1934. The modernised route was officially opened by the new Minister of Transport, Leslie Hore-Belisha, who gave his name to the amber flashing lights on zebra crossings, which for many years were known as 'Belisha beacons'. The ceremony took place on 27 September 1934, at the road-side near Abriachan pier. By this time interest in the Monster was beginning to fade.

Sightings continued on an intermittent basis but media interest had largely evaporated. After the Second World War there were further sporadic sightings but public interest was at best parochial. In setting out her case for the Monster's existence Constance Whyte described one aspect of its behaviour which had been witnessed some three years before her first written contribution to the subject:

> It seems that quite often the Monster moves along just below the surface of the water. There is a strong V-shaped wash, enough to cause waves to break on the shore yet nothing showing above water level to cause it. The Canal Manager saw this very plainly in 1946 when motoring by the lochside with David McBryde, Canal Foreman.

Mrs Whyte was confident that the conclusion that the Monster was responsible for this kind of wave 'seems justified'. Indeed, by lurking just below the surface the Monster might avoid surveillance while at the same time filling its lungs:

> If the creature sometimes comes up for air and for nothing else this could easily be done without its being noticed at all.

In the six decades since *More Than a Legend* was published no one seems to have noticed the author's reticence about that witness 'The Canal Manager', whose name is not given. In fact, this individual was an Englishman and he was appointed to the position in 1937. His name was Frank Whyte and his wife, also English, was named Constance. In short, Mrs Whyte's enthusiasm for the Loch Ness Monster derived in part from being married to an eye-witness. In 86 years of monster commentary no one ever seems to have noticed this or to have pointed out its significance.

Historical accuracy has never been the strong point of Nessie enthusiasts, whether the topic is Scottish social history or even the history of the Loch Ness Monster saga. '[Rupert] Gould himself never returned to Loch Ness,' confidently wrote Gareth Williams in *A Monstrous Commotion* (2015). He was referring to Gould's two circular trips round the loch on a motorbike in the autumn of 1933.

In reality Rupert Gould returned to Loch Ness shortly after Hore-Belisha's visit. He arrived there in October 1934. On this occasion he stayed in Fort Augustus, the loch-side village more associated with the Monster than any other. While there he talked to Alex Campbell. The two men agreed that the Monster could not possibly be a seal. Gould had already demolished that preposterous explanation of the sceptics in his Monster book. Both men agreed that the surgeon's photograph conclusively showed that the animal was not a seal. There was also the eye-witness evidence.

The two men had good reason to be perturbed about the seal theory.

On 15 September 1934 Captain James Fraser, field commander of the Edward Mountain expedition, spotted the Monster motionless in the water fifty yards offshore, some half a mile east of Temple Pier. Conditions were 'misty'. He managed to shoot some twenty seconds of movie film, using a Kodak ciné camera with a six inch telephoto lens, at a range of three-quarters of a mile. The film was processed and projected before an audience of 'scientists and others interested in the subject' at Kodak House in London on 27 September. Six prominent zoologists identified the mystery creature as a seal. Captain Fraser had estimated its length at fifteen feet – far too long for a seal – but since the animal was three-quarters of a mile away and lighting conditions were poor the accuracy of his assessment is highly questionable. Kodak had offered its own assessment of the object shown in the film but when the film was projected before the Linnaean Society one member suggested 'that Kodak's estimate of the size (eight feet) was too great'.

In *More Than a Legend* Constance Whyte quotes three indignant letters to the *Field* denouncing the seal theory. Self-proclaimed seal expert Major C. E. Radclyffe asserted that 'no member of the seal family can remain for more than a short time below the water'. This was nonsense. Seals store oxygen in their blood and myoglobin in their muscles enable them to store oxygen during dives. Harbour seals can stay underwater for 25 minutes; some grey seals can stay underwater for an hour.

Gilfrid Hartley asserted 'I have watched seals for many years... my experience has been that they spend a good deal of their time in basking – often in large herds – on flat rocks and on quiet shores – this especially in sunny weather – and I think no one has seen anything of the kind on Loch Ness. Then the seal is often not a timid creature.' In fact, the Margaret Munro land sighting earlier that year probably involved a seal and Loch Ness is not short of isolated locations where a seal could come ashore unseen.

C. M. Hope of North Audley Street, London, agreed with Major Radclyffe that the Monster could not possibly be a seal, adding 'I have always been led to understand that seals display a friendly disposition towards man'. Hope quoted no less an authority than *The Enyclopaedia Britannica* to asserts that 'Seals are very inquisitive creatures.'

These quotations underline both their authors' ignorance of seal behaviour and the irrelevance of Constance Whyte citing them while

ignoring contemporary descriptions of Captain Fraser's film. The reporter for the *Aberdeen Journal* (28 September 1934) unequivocally stated that 'There can be seen clearly something like a seal':

> The 'monster' would show what appeared to be its head, and then submerge, rising to the surface again two seconds later to repeat the process. This happened eight or nine times, and then the monster, without consideration for the army of observers, apparently decided to submerge for good. Hence the film comes to a quick ending.

That certainly sounds exactly like the behaviour of a seal.

The reporter for the *Nottingham Evening Post* (28 September 1934) was also unimpressed: 'It is difficult from the film to estimate what type of creature it is. From a cursory glance it would seem to be a seal sporting in the water.' However, 'The experts agree that the length of the creature showing above the water is about eight or nine feet.' Moreover:

> Lieut.-Commander Gould, who has made a close study of sea monsters, declares the creature is not a seal. It is certainly not completely seal-like in its movements, showing a certain ungainliness which supporters of the monster theory argue indicates that there is a large body under the water.

However:

> There is no sign of a wake behind the creature, and from that it would be inferred that if the major part of the creature has been photographed it is of dimensions similar to a seal.

The *Hartlepool Mail* (28 September 1934) was also distinctly cool about this film evidence of the beast of Loch Ness, reporting that those 'who expected to see a huge creature with a long tapering neck and big humps were disappointed. What they did see was something which appeared to be about the size of a seal taking its morning exercise.' It added dryly: 'In the matter of size the monster did not come up to expectations, but probably it will grow before the next tourist season.'

In fact, Sir Edward Mountain's organised watch of Loch Ness simply anticipated the parallel failure of the Loch Ness Investigation in the

1960s and early 1970s. Mass surveillance of the surface simply exposes the absence of a large unknown animal and when motion film is shot it is always of an ambiguous object seen at extreme range. In the case of Captain Fraser's footage matters have been further complicated by the disappearance of the film. But even if it was rediscovered in a usable condition nothing would be resolved. Sceptics would see a seal and believers would see a monster.

On 21 April 1960 Tim Dinsdale visited the water-bailiff and local journalist at his river-side home for the first time. Dinsdale had yet to see the Monster and he wanted to hear from someone who was both an expert and an eye-witness. What transpired that afternoon curiously echoes the recognition scene from *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* released just seven years earlier.

> I showed him a large picture of the family of Plesiosaurs which demonstrated clearly a dozen different types; all of different shapes – some with long necks and small heads, and some with short necks and enormous heads and jaws like crocodiles. There were also other creatures mixed up amongst them – Ichyosaurus, a type of early reptile which looked like a fish; Archelon, a monstrous form of turtle, and others.
>
> ...I will always remember his reaction. He glanced at the picture just once – and then pointed at the Elasmosaurus, the long-necked giant, and said in a quiet voice: 'That's it – that's it, only with a shorter neck.' His action was entirely spontaneous and without intentional drama, and yet his words had a remarkable effect – because I knew the comparison he made was real; based on his own experience when he had watched the animal with its head and neck upraised, at no great distance – and it was because of these words I stayed an extra day, and got the film!

When Nesbitt in *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* is shown pictures of dinosaurs he looks through them, one by one. Then, finally, he exclaims in excitement, recognising the same animal which he himself saw: a Rhedosaurus. And we know he's right because we, the viewers, have seen it too.

The same confidence cannot be placed in Campbell's testimony. His sighting of an Elasmosaurus-type monster in Loch Ness was a classic case of expectant attention being rewarded by the sight of cormorants witnessed at a distance in poor lighting conditions from a limited surface-level perspective. Campbell's illusory monster sighting then inspired Tim Dinsdale who, brimming with expectant attention, promptly drove away and that very same day filmed waves breaking over rocks at the mouth of the River Foyers, and then, two days later, a distant boat crossing the loch off Foyers, converting both experiences into monster-sightings.

In 1972 Tim Dinsdale interviewed Margaret Cameron, who as a child had seen the Monster on land at Inchnacardoch Bay:

> Quite recently Mrs Cameron had collected Brooke Bond picture cards, from tea packets, showing prehistoric animals, and had selected one which seemed to be the closest.

There was another moment of recognition.

This time the image selected was that of a brontosaurus.

'I'm a psychiatrist,' says the expert sceptic in *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*. 'I thought that together we might possibly get to the bottom of this.' But the eye-witness who *knows* they've seen a monster can never be persuaded otherwise.

The psychiatrist adds, 'There was the famous Loch Lomond monster, you possibly recall.'

The famous Loch Lomond monster? It's a sign of just how far Nessie's fortunes had sunk by 1953 that in Hollywood they couldn't even get the geography right. Meanwhile, in Britain the following year, the science fiction film *Devil Girl from Mars* was released. It is set, as one of the characters remarks, in 'Scotland of all places. The home of the Loch Ness Monster.' In fact, the movie is located in Iverness-shire, and one of the locals, Jamie, responds, 'Ach, I'll not hear a word against that ancient animal. No, it did Scotland a power of good.' Jamie goes on to remark that he has himself seen the Monster. But Jamie is a comic character who is never far from a whisky bottle. His wife terminates the discussion with the sardonic comment: 'Aye, that was the time you saw two monsters, Jamie.'

By the mid-fifties Nessie was simply a half-forgotten joke – the stuff of background comedy. But *Devil Girl from Mars* once again established that where unusual phenomena were concerned – whether revived dinosaurs or visiting Martians in flying saucers – the eye-witnesses were right and the sceptics were always wrong. There was a public appetite for the outlandish and the bizarre. Where the Loch Ness Monster was concerned the time was ripe to wake this half-forgotten creature from its long slumber. Constance Whyte and Tim Dinsdale were waiting in the wings to make the unreal seem possible. And the force of contemporary popular culture was with them.

2

Listen to the Lion

Though the sightings are consistent and the witnesses reliable, the hard evidence for an extant population of big cats in the UK is no stronger than the evidence for the Loch Ness monster. In other words, despite the thousands of days cryptozoologists have spent hunting the Beast, the Royal Marines and government scientists, there is none.

George Monbiot, *Feral* (2013)

On Monday 27 August 2012 BBC News and national newspapers reported that police in Essex were investigating sightings of a lion on the loose in Essex. The creature had been spotted the day before near a caravan park at St Osyth, near Clacton.

The animal was first seen near Earls Hall Drive by holidaymaker Bob Martin and his wife at about 7pm on Sunday. Denise Martin, 52, told the Press Association:

> 'I was looking out of the window and we saw smoke – it looked like there had been a bit of a bonfire. When you are in a caravan you panic about smoke. When the smoke cleared I could see this shape in the field, so I got the binoculars out. We had a look and it looked like a lion. I said to my husband "What do you make of that?" He said "That's a lion."
>
> We walked out of the caravan nearer to the field to get a better look. Five or 10 minutes later we got my brother and my sister-in-law to have a look. They came and looked at it and said "It looks like a lion." My husband phoned the police.'

Mr Martin said that when he saw the large cat-like creature a lion 'was the first thing that came to mind'. Denise Martin said: 'I got the binoculars out. It looked like a lion.'

The mystery animal was several hundred yards away. It was described by the eye-witnesses as 'very impressive.' Mrs Martin said: 'It was the size of a lion. It had a white chest with like a tan, beige-colour body.'

Her sister-in-law and fellow holidaymaker, Sue Wright, 58, took a photograph of what was believed to be the lion. 'We watched it for a good half-an-hour before it disappeared. There is no doubt in my mind that we were looking at a lion.'

They decided to call the police. A building maintenance inspector, who was staying at the caravan site, described to a journalist how he and wife were eating when there was a knock on the window of their caravan. He said: 'A gentleman was asking if we could confirm to the police that we were witnessing a lion across the other side of the field.' He scrutinised the mystery beast and agreed to the request, telling the police: 'Yes, what the gentleman has just told you is definitely a very large animal, and possibly a lion, definitely a large cat.' He described the animal as being the length of two sheep 'put together'.

When the first police arrived, Sue Wright showed them her photograph. The decision was taken to launch a full-scale search. Twenty-five officers were rushed to St Osyth, including a dozen armed police. Two helicopters with heat-seeking equipment were sent to investigate. Colchester Zoo was contacted but said none of its three lions, nor any other animals, had gone missing. Its zoological director Anthony Tropeano visited the location and examined Mrs Wright's picture, commenting: 'The photograph shows an animal in a field, it is a sandy brown colour, but the photography is of such poor quality it's not possible for us to say one way or the other what it definitely is.' Sarah Forsyth, the zoo's rhino curator, was called out to help investigate the reports. She commented: 'We were shown some photographs, but they were from very far away, very poor quality and to be honest there was no way of saying "yes" or "no". It certainly wasn't a male lion. It didn't have a mane.'

However, she conceded that in one picture the animal did appear to have 'quite a large head'. But she was sceptical and told one journalist she believed that the 'lion' was more likely to be a large dog. To be on the safe side, employees of Colchester Zoo equipped with tranquilliser guns joined armed officers in the hunt. Apart from hoping to sight the animal,

they also sought other evidence such as tracks and droppings. Director Tropeano later said: 'There were absolutely no sightings of it during the time I was there. Nothing really to provide any further evidence to suggest it had been there – just the fact of these couple of eye witness accounts.'

Lion fever swept the village. Dave Sparks, landlord of the Red Lion pub in St Osyth, told ITV News the police hunt was 'surreal'. Rumours spread that the animal might have escaped from The Great British Circus, which was based as Clacton Airfield. But farmer Roger Lord, who co-owned the caravan site, was sceptical of the reports. He watched the animal through his binoculars and told reporters: 'I had a look and said, "That's a cat." It was sitting in stubble that was six to eight inches high and you could just see its head sticking out of the top. In my opinion it was a cat. I don't think it was large enough to be a lion but probably a big ginger cat. It was pale and I suppose a bit lion-coloured.'

But others were convinced they'd seen a lion. Richard Baker, 39, said: 'A man started running towards us yelling, "It's a fucking lion". He looked so panicked you knew it was not a joke.' Mr Baker described how he grabbed his children by the hand and ran for the safety of their caravan: 'It was one million per cent a lion. It was a tan colour with a big mane, it was definitely a lion.'

Further confirmation of the lion's existence came from local resident Che Kevlin:

> 'I was sitting downstairs with my wife playing backgammon and I heard a large roar, and I said to my wife, "Did you hear that?" She said, "I heard something." I said, "Well, I heard a large roar." She said, "Well, do you think it's just upstairs on the TV?" Anyway I went upstairs to check and I got a text from my brother saying that there was a lion on the loose in St Osyth, apparently.'

He told BBC News: 'It sounded like the roar of a lion. We have field and wood just behind our fence, so you never know.' Another witness was Rob Hull, a barman, who knew about the lion from Facebook and Twitter. He saw it 'ambling laconically along by the lake in the field, like it didn't have a care in the world'.

Later that night, at 11.20pm, Essex Police tweeted: 'Police are working with experts from *@colchesterzoo* who can tranquilise the animal when

it is found.' As the story became national news three Twitter accounts *@EssexLion*, *@TheEssexLion* and *@Essex_Lion* were set up. A photograph of the lion circulated on Twitter. Taken at night it showed a male lion at close quarters, with cars in the foreground. The *Daily Mail* website ran it as an image 'believed to be' the mystery beast of St Osyth.

Officers spent almost 24 hours combing the countryside around Clacton-on-Sea. Spokeswoman Donna Veasey told the BBC that one reported sighting had turned out to be a cat. Next day, the search was called off. Essex Police released a statement which said:

> We believe what was seen on Sunday evening was either a large domestic cat or a wildcat. Extensive searches have been carried out, areas examined and witnesses spoken to; yet nothing has been found to suggest that a lion was in the area. We would like to thank the local community and holidaymakers for their patience and support throughout the past 24 hours as the police and media presence would have been somewhat overwhelming for them.

No animals were missing from any zoos, public or private, and The Great British Circus, it transpired, had departed from Clacton Airfield a fortnight earlier. The circus told police that none of their animals were missing and in any case it didn't possess any lions. The Twitter photograph turned out to be a fake image, first used to fool people into believing that a lion that had escaped from London Zoo during the previous year's riots.

The saga ended in anticlimax as two candidates were proposed for the Essex lion. The first was a 12-year-old ginger tomcat, Tom, who lived at an old folk's home less than 200 metres from the original sighting.

> 'He's always out in the fields hunting for mice, rats and even hares… His colouring does make him look a bit like a lion but he's not dangerous. He's quite a large, mean-looking tom, but beneath all that he's an affectionate cat who just likes the odd stroke. The residents love having him around the place.'

The other was a domestic cat called Teddy Bear, which lived near the caravan park. His owner said:

> ‘From a distance, because he has a light-coloured mane he does look a little lion-like. I can see why someone would think that. He’s a Maine Coon, which is the biggest breed of domestic cat. And he’s got the personality to match, he has such a bad attitude and puts the dog in his place all the time. He thinks he’s the man of the house and has often been mistaken for a fox.’

The Guardian laconically noted that

> In May last year, a sighting of an escaped white tiger prompted a major police operation, stopped play at the Rose Bowl cricket ground and forced golfers off the golf course. Upon closer examination with thermal imaging cameras, however, officers realised that the white tiger was in fact a cuddly toy.

The paper also drew a connection with another legendary beast:

> The Beast of Bodmin is still the most famous ‘big cat’ in British history. After years of reported sightings – and the killing of livestock on Cornish moorland – it was declared a phantom in 1995 after an investigation by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concluded there was ‘no verifiable evidence’ of exotic felines loose in Britain.

But, of course, the biggest phantom of them all is the Loch Ness Monster, and the curious case of the Essex lion helps to illuminate what occurred at the loch in 1933. It vividly demonstrates how honest eye-witnesses misperceive something which is commonplace and explicable and convert it into something exotic and unusual. Once the phenomenon is given credibility and authority, others then start to see it too. In Essex the original witnesses described an animal like a lioness but very quickly other witnesses were seeing a male lion with a mane. Perhaps the most remarkable eye-witness testimony is that of the man who *heard* a lion roaring before (he insisted) he even knew a lion was reputed to be on the loose. The credibility of the beast was then strengthened by a genuine photograph of something distant but ambiguous and unidentifiable, quickly followed by a startlingly close and clear picture which subsequently turned out to be a hoax.

The Essex lion story was always doomed to die because of the nature of the habitat. A lion roaming free in a densely populated environment like Essex quickly loses all credibility if it leaves no tracks or droppings and cannot be located by heat-seeking helicopters. An organised hunt for the animal failed to find it and after the first rush of eye-witness encounters there were no other sightings.

That was where the Loch Ness Monster had the edge on other phantom beasts. No one could ever hope definitively to establish that the loch was devoid of a large unknown animal because it was simply impossible to search it comprehensively. And because the Monster was defined from the very beginning as a shape-shifter, there was never any shortage of phenomena at the surface to match the *idea* of a monster with the perception of one.

The Essex lion saga was scarcely a unique one. Eighteen years earlier there was a sudden flood of reports of a lioness being sighted in Winchmore Hill in north London. Police toured local streets with loudhailers advising local residents to keep their children and pets indoors. Douglas Richardson, assistant curator of mammals at London Zoo, was called in to investigate, accompanied by a vet with a tranquilliser gun. Police showed Richardson a photograph of the mystery beast. He identified it as a 'not particularly large cat'. An eye-witness description of the creature's body matched those of a bull mastiff. The great Winchmore Hill lioness scare fizzled out and was soon forgotten.

Richardson dryly commented:

> The public are not very good at identifying the most common exotic animals. They can be looking at a cage clearly labelled tiger, and they call it a lion. The same with rhinos and hippos.
>
> I am rather surprised that police get the results they do with the identification of human beings.

The grip of exoticism is enduring. As the 2012 Essex lion story fizzled and died, a new narrative began. As one mystery animal faded into obscurity, another one was proposed. On the very same day that it identified Teddy Bear as the Essex lion, the *Daily Mail* reported:

> A panther has been spotted on the loose in the Cotswolds today.

Kieran Bourne, 30, said he was convinced he saw a big cat in his headlights as he made his way home across Cleeve Hill in the early hours of this morning.

He nearly collided with the animal by the side of the road, swerved, and saw it pounce into the bushes and disappear.

Mr Bourne contacted 'a big cat expert' (unidentified) after the sighting and said he believed 'it was the same creature which shocked residents in fields at Winchcombe, near Cheltenham'. He was 'now 100 per cent sure' of the identity of what he'd seen. So are the more than 2,000 people a year who report sighting a big cat on the loose in Britain. In his book *Feral*, the journalist and environmental campaigner George Monbiot examines the case of the Pembrokeshire Panther. He concludes that, although eye-witnesses include such experienced people as gamekeepers, park rangers, wildlife experts and a retired zookeeper, they are all mistaken. Mystery big cats – described as big, black, glossy and muscular – don't exist.

There are all kinds of scientific objections to believing that they do. Big cats are territorial creatures, which leave all kinds of traces ('prints, spraints and hairs'). Prints are immediately identifiable. DNA testing can quickly establish the provenance of tangible physical evidence. Attempts to hunt mystery big cats always end in failure. Baited traps don't catch them. The animals elude motion-sensor cameras left out in the wild. There are never any remains in the form of bones or dead bodies. 'One of the most intriguing features of the story,' Monbiot observes, 'is that hardly anyone who has set out to find a big cat in Britain has ever seen one.' The vast majority of sightings are random ones. The answer to the big cat mystery, he believes (just like the psychiatrist in *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*) lies in the mind. The brain processes visual information in a very special way. Exaggerations of size can result from this: 'If we are focused on a cat and not on its surroundings, it could be that the process of singling out the beast magnifies it and shrinks the setting.' This may well be true for split-second encounters although it perhaps underestimates the notorious difficulty in assessing the size and distance of objects which are unfamiliar as well as the human propensity to exaggerate stories for effect.

Secondly, Monbiot suggests the human mind may be hard-wired to be on the alert for cat-like predators:

> I wonder, too, whether there might be a kind of template in our minds in the form of a big cat. As these were once our ancestors' foremost predators, we have a powerful evolutionary interest in recognising them before the conscious mind can process and interpret the image. It could be possible that anything which vaguely fits the template triggers the big cat alarm: we lose little by seeing cats which do not exist, but lose a lot by failing to see those which do.

Big cats, he concludes, are rooted in the mind, not the British countryside: 'Our desires stare back at us, yellow-eyed and snarling, from the thickets of the mind.'

But the same applies to black dogs and the Hound of the Baskervilles:

> I went on Dartmoor alone one winter dusk in 1946, with a mist coming down, to search for a section of recruits lost on an orientation exercise. I was climbing a slope up to a tor. The light had gone, and I could just make out the massive boulders against the coming night. Then suddenly and silently a formidable black shape moved and stood in a breach of the rocks above me. I haven't forgotten the few moments of pure atavistic terror that possessed me before I had the sense to pull out the Very pistol I was carrying… and plainly I lived to tell the tale. And yes, of course, it must have been a wild pony; but what I *saw*, like many a lonely and bemisted moorman before me, was the Hound. They, after all, did not carry Very pistols; nor had they read Jung and Freud.

Ironically, Monbiot was altogether too generous in his assessment of the human capacity to be misled. He regarded it as hugely significant that big cat sightings never involve leopards with spots but always an animal which in every aspect except size most resembles a domestic black cat. 'If you glimpse what you take to be a ginger leopard or a tortoiseshell lion, you are likely severely to question your perceptions before allowing yourself to accept what you think you saw.' The strange saga of the Essex lion shows that in this instance Monbiot was wrong. And though the Loch Ness monster is most often perceived as black in colour, it, too, also comes in other varieties. Perhaps the most striking of all is the specimen seen on 15 June 1965, described as 'yellowish-brown in colour, almost mustard-coloured'. The witness, Ted Holiday, found it 'perplexing', since

he 'had no idea that there were yellowish [Monsters] as well as black ones'. The object was first seen at a distance of two and a half miles, at 10.30pm. Although at that distance its shape was unidentifiable 'the thing had a sort of latent strangeness about it which suddenly suggested it was not a boat'. Holiday drove to a point where he could get closer to the object. From here 'it looked even less like a conventional boat than it had from Strone'. He estimated that 'this large, mustard-coloured mass' was 10 feet wide, 25-30 feet long and 5-6 feet in height.

Two witnesses on the other shore also saw the mystery object. They agreed with Holiday on the dimensions. But 'Silhouetted as it was against the evening sky, they were unable to make out any details.' From a sceptical perspective it is all too evident that what these witnesses saw was indeed a boat. Its size and colour matched that of a boat, as did the course it followed down the loch. No one saw it erupt into view from the depths. The witnesses claimed to see it submerge and then reappear but they were viewing a distant object in very poor lighting conditions. By 11.15pm it was lost sight of in the darkness. But no one reading Holiday's *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* could believe that he had seen anything other than the Monster. He proudly registered the fact that the episode 'made Loch Ness history, since it seems to have been the longest continuous sighting on record'. It was not until his next book, *The Dragon and the Disc*, published five years later, that he conceded something which he'd previously kept concealed. In his report of the episode written down for the Loch Ness Investigation he himself had written: 'It could have been a boat.'

Holiday darkly hinted that he had been compelled to deny the truth of what he had seen because of 'a mental block' which stemmed from 'the true nature of dragons'. The monsters of Loch Ness were, he suggested, 'either not animals at all or, if they are, that they exist within a matrix of causation that is quite unlike any other living thing'. The monster was no longer simply a shape-shifting physical entity. The inability to capture it on film could only indicate paranormal forces at work.

Even a writer like Colin Wilson was unsympathetic to the direction which Ted Holiday took, referring to 'the rather strange views he had gradually developed since starting his hunt for the Loch Ness monster'. Those strange views reached a climax in his follow-up to *The Dragon and the Disc*. As Wilson delicately puts it, 'the argument of *The Goblin Universe* was not quite as rigorous as it might be'. He accuses Holiday of

‘pessimism about the monster’. Reasonably enough, Wilson interprets the direction of Holiday’s thinking as an illustration of ‘the immense frustration experienced by monster-hunters in the 1970s and 1980s’. But Wilson was surely wrong in interpreting Holiday’s pessimism as premature. He asserts that it is ‘perfectly clear…that the creatures of Loch Ness appear above the surface fairly frequently, particularly on calm days’. In the era ‘of laser beams and electronic surveillance’ proving the monster’s existence should be easy. Wilson looks forward to the day ‘When the “monster” is finally identified and classified’. Thirty years on from that conclusion the proof of the monster’s existence is as elusive as ever. Wilson’s optimism was, so to speak, positively Dinsdalean.

3

Tim Dinsdale's Breakfast

At dawn, on this last day of the hunt, I got up and repeated the usual pre-breakfast activities.

Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (1961)

The Loch Ness saga first took off with a news story published in the *Inverness Courier* on 3 May 1933. It described the experience of Aldie McKay, who one night in the spring of that year witnessed from the north shore road a 'tremendous upheaval' in the loch. In July a couple came forward to claim they had seen the monster on land. Mr and Mrs Spicer reported sighting a creature resembling 'a dragon or prehistoric animal' while 'driving from Dores to Foyes (again on the north bank of the loch)'. The best-known film footage of the monster was obtained in 1960, by Tim Dinsdale, who at 9am on 23 April 'was eating breakfast when he was amazed to see what he believed was a creature in the water near Foyers'.

These 'facts' about the Monster appear in David Clarke's *Britain's X-Traordinary Files*, which is an account of what official records in The National Archives at Kew reveal about the British state's interest in a wide range of anomalous phenomena of the kind reported in the popular media. They include ghosts, extraterrestrials, 'remote viewing' and other military and intelligence topics, aviation disasters, phantom helicopters, UFOs and, of course, the Loch Ness Monster. Clarke explains that his major research tool was the search engine developed by The National Archives allowing access to the famous collection at Kew, supplemented by archival research elsewhere. According to the blurb, 'These accounts are supplemented with contextual material gathered from interviews and

the author's own investigations, making truly eye-opening reading for anyone interested in the paranormal.'

My eyes certainly opened wide when I read Clarke's account of the material described in the first paragraph. If his assertions were to be found in the *Daily Mail*, embedded in a sensational story about the latest amazing new Nessie photograph, one would merely sigh, shrug and move on. But *Britain's X-Traordinary Files* is published by Bloomsbury – a major British publisher with a weighty reputation. What's more, Clarke is Senior Lecturer in Journalism at Sheffield Hallam University and a researcher and consultant who has worked for Radio 4 and BBC2's Timewatch series. This makes his misrepresentations of quite basic material all the more surprising.

Now, of course, all authors make mistakes and to get the date of the seminal *Inverness Courier* Nessie report wrong by one day – it was 2 May 2 not 3 May – is the kind of minor slip any author might make, as is the misspelling of Aldie Mackay's surname or 'Foyes' when it should be 'Foyers' or the month when George Spicer first publicised his amazing land sighting (August, not July). Clarke also mistakenly attributes the title of Alex Campbell's seminal news item to the *Inverness Courier*'s report of the Spicer sighting.

But the other errors are egregious ones. The Mackay sighting did not take place 'one night' but rather at 'about 3pm' with the 'sun shining brightly'. The road from Dores to Foyers is, of course, on the south bank of the loch, not the north. And Tim Dinsdale was most definitely not eating his breakfast when he saw his monster and proceeded to film it.

These last three errors indicate a superficial engagement with the Nessie saga and a casual disregard for quite basic facts, which anyone who writes about the monster surely ought to get right. I take no pleasure in pointing this out, since Clarke, although passionate about Fortean phenomena, is at heart a sceptic and a debunker. He publishes an entertaining and informative blog and is the author of an acclaimed deconstruction of Unidentified Flying Objects.

The problem with the kinds of error which I have indicated is that it dents one's confidence in Clarke's ability to convey information accurately. Sadly, the Monster also puts in a brief appearance in Clarke's *How UFOs Conquered the World: The History of a Modern Myth* (2015). This is an entertaining hatchet-job on the notion that UFOs involve extraterrestrial visitors. The book's conclusions about the fallibility of

eye-witness evidence are every bit as applicable to those who report encounters with Nessie as to those who see flying saucers. But Clarke displays a less than informed approach to some of his expert witnesses. Thus, he describes an interview with Jim Carruthers, a retired senior Ministry of Defence official who liaised with military and intelligence officials and who was involved in UFO investigation. Carruthers's career in outré matters began with JARIC's involvement with the Dinsdale film.

> 'They produced an intriguing report that said there was something in this,' Jim explained. 'JARIC said the film showed an "animate object" in the loch. When this story leaked out, there was a huge fuss in the newspapers that someone had got a film of something that looked like a dinosaur and claimed this had been confirmed by the RAF. In reality it was nothing of the kind. Years later I learnt the "monster" was a model that had been filmed in a situation where you could not measure its size, much like many images that claimed to show UFOs.'

This, of course, is simply bizarre, and throws into question the reliability of Mr Carruthers' memory and the source of his claim to know the truth behind the film. No one has ever previously suggested that Tim Dinsdale filmed a model, or that the footage was not shot at Loch Ness. Nor is it true that the object he filmed cannot be measured for size. The problem JARIC faced is that Dinsdale wouldn't allow them to project the film, which meant they almost certainly miscalculated the speed of the object by failing to take into account the film breaks for rewinding. JARIC's approach to an ex-RAF man like Dinsdale was probably over-deferential and their assumption that surface craft 'would scarcely be missed by an observer' displayed both ignorance of the loch's habitat and naïvety about the reliability of eye-witness perception. By citing Carruthers without comment, Clarke helps to further muddy waters which had long been muddied by Dinsdale himself, who was keen to put his own spin on the JARIC report:

> The report accepted the film as genuine and on the basis of pure mensuration of the original filmed image stated that the object seen was neither a surface boat nor a submarine – 'which leaves the conclusion it is probably an animate object.'

Here Dinsdale was being deliberately misleading. JARIC's conclusions about the object not being a boat or a submarine were not based on its mathematical analysis but on assumptions imported from outside the material it was scrutinising. The organisation's analysis of the film was consequently far from objective or scientific.

Having entered these caveats, what do Clarke's researches in *Britain's X-Traordinary Files* reveal?

We learn that at various points during the long Nessie saga various influential figures (especially members of parliament) pressured the State to take action, both to protect the Monster from harm and to investigate the animal for the benefit of science. But special legislation to protect this elusive species was regarded as unnecessary and there was widespread resistance to the notion of devoting institutional resources to an investigation. In view of the paucity of tangible evidence the scientific establishment was largely sceptical. The Royal Navy declined to get involved but the RAF agreed to analyse the Dinsdale film.

I found the most interesting material unearthed by Clarke to be Tim Dinsdale's communications with the British Museum in 1960. A symptom of this particular monster hunter's excitability on 23 April 1960 was that he chose to send 'a lengthy cable' addressed to 'the directors of the British Museum, London'. Dinsdale himself described how he had done this:

> recording the fact that on the 21st and 23rd of April, 1960, I had exposed so many feet of film, through such and such a lens, with such and such a camera, on the 'phenomenon' known as the Loch Ness Monster, promising that in due course I would report on the result.

Dinsdale was strangely vague about the technical specifics of his great achievement and so it is illuminating of Clarke to cite extracts from this telegram which clarify these matters. He wrote that he had 'exposed approximately 70 ft of a 16mm film through a 135mm lens'.

This confirms what Dinsdale wrote in his 'Final Results'. He had shot around 20 feet of film of that 'hidden shoal of rocks' at the mouth of the River Foyers (which would have run for about 26 seconds). But, perplexingly, in *Loch Ness Monster* Dinsdale wrote how, when projected, 'running on for several minutes, the film portrayed the disturbance I had

seen at the mouth of the Foyers river'. It is impossible to reconcile the figure in the telegram with Dinsdale's account in his book. It illustrates yet again the obstacles in the way of understanding a film which has never been shown in its entirety and which Dinsdale's heirs refuse to make available for independent study.

Dinsdale describes how his telegram to the British Museum promised that once his film had been processed he would 'report on the result':

> I did this because the Museum represented the highest zoological authority in the country and I felt they ought to be the first people to know about it.

The wording of his telegram actually reveals a rather more pompous communication in which Dinsdale grandly announces that he will need to view his film and then 'when I have studied this I will present my report in detail…until then I must ask for your complete confidence'.

The cable was shown to the museum director, Sir Gavin de Beer, who decided 'No action'. Hearing nothing back from the Museum by May 1st, Dinsdale wrote again, saying that where his film was concerned he had now 'watched its projection a number of times'. He was convinced that the Museum's attitude to the 'phenomenon' would now have to change and accept the reality of the Monster.

Although Clarke doesn't say whether or not the Museum replied to Dinsdale (one suspects it didn't), it would appear the institution's position remained unchanged. It was interested only in tangible evidence, a living or dead specimen. Eye-witness evidence, questionable photographs or ambiguous films were not enough. Nor were communications from unknown individuals who claimed to have filmed the Monster twice in three days. The Museum's caution is understandable, and the passage of time has demonstrated that it was entirely justified. In the end it was those two powerful media outlets, the *Daily Mail* and the BBC, which transformed Dinsdale's fortunes and brought his footage of a distant boat to the nation's attention.

It was only the following year that it emerged that Dinsdale had sighted his monster on an empty stomach. In his book he describes how on 23 April 1960 he rose very early and by 5.20am he was gazing at Borlum Bay, presumably hoping to see the same wondrous creature that Alex Campbell had reported seeing in 1933. Later he drove on through

Fort Augustus and took the Invermoriston road, parking opposite the Horseshoe crag. From this vantage point he hoped to see the beast on land, as reported by Torquil Macleod. At 8.40am he gave up. He was starving: 'As the hours passed, I began to think of breakfast – the delicious sound and smell of frying eggs and bacon plagued my imagination and my very empty stomach. At last I could stand it no longer…'

The absence of breakfast was another aspect of Dinsdale's physical and mental state that morning.

After his subsequent epiphany on the road above Lower Foyers, and after descending to the lochside to watch for another hour, Dinsdale drove back to the Foyers Hotel. 'After breakfast I spoke to the proprietor about getting a boat to go out on the loch…'

Did Dinsdale devour a hearty plateful of fried eggs and bacon that morning? Or was he so consumed by excitement that he had little appetite for food?

We'll never know. But – *pace* Dr Clarke – it is always important to get the chronology right. *Monster first, breakfast afterwards.*

But obviously one doesn't want to make a meal of it.

4

The Other 1933 Monster

A live animal will settle the Loch Ness question once and for all.

Roy P. Mackal, *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (1976)

In mid-January 1933, some three and a half months before the *Inverness Courier*'s seminal news story about a monster in Loch Ness, an immense, dead creature was washed ashore at Scarborough in Yorkshire. It was seventeen feet long. At first it was thought to be the remains of a shark, and then of a whale. In fact, it belonged to neither species.

The body lay on the beach at South Bay and attracted crowds of visitors, some of whom swarmed over the carcass, damaging it and making identification even more difficult. Fortunately, Scarborough was the home of Mr W. J. Clarke, 'a zealous observer of Caphalopods in the North Sea'. When he saw what lay on the beach he immediately recognised the mystery beast as an immense squid. The carcass was duly transported to London's Natural History Museum, where it was identified as a hitherto unknown type of giant squid. It was named *Architeuthis clarkei*, in honour of the man who had first recognised its identity and value and who had managed to save it for science. In later years more specimens of this type of giant squid were washed up, further north on the Scottish coast.

The giant squid is curiously relevant to the Loch Ness saga for a number of reasons, apart from the coincidence of the year 1933. In that legendary year it was apparently proposed as an explanation for the monster and one of Rupert Gould's least persuasive witnesses, W. U. Goodbody, was convinced that a giant squid would match what he'd

witnessed in the loch. But the giant squid hypothesis had nothing to recommend it because, apart from a number of rather basic zoological objections to the creature's remarkable arrival and survival in Loch Ness, it bore no resemblance at all to what eye-witnesses reported seeing. Sceptics did not need to search for exotic sea creatures to explain monster sightings, when altogether more mundane identifications were both available and rather more plausible.

Among the cryptozoological fraternity the giant squid has also come in useful as a tool for arguing that ancient legends of giant animals can turn out to be true. After all, this is 'the creature the ancients called "the kraken"'. Rupert Gould noted the satisfying fact that 'its existence was, for many years, entirely discredited by scientific men'. He cites the case of the French corvette the *Alecton*, whose crew in 1861 reported an encounter with a giant squid estimated to weigh two tons, with a length (less tentacles) of 15 feet. They were unable to haul it aboard. This was reported to the Académie des Sciences, whose response was 'scientific caution' ('a complacent attitude,' Gould rages; 'in other words, of complete scepticism'). Gould also cites the pioneering work of the Reverend M. Harvey, of Newfoundland, and Professor A. E. Verrill, of Yale, whose work on the carcases of giant squids was published in 1879, which 'speedily transformed what had hitherto been regarded as an old wives' tale into an accepted scientific fact'. And if the giant squid was present at the beginning of the Loch Ness saga, it was also there as the golden age of monster hunting came to an end. In 1989 Denys Tucker applauded Pierre Denys de Montfort, recorder of 'accounts of the Kraken and the Giant Octopus in his *Histoire naturelle des Mollusques* (1802)', who was dismissed from his post at the Muséum National d'Histoire naturelle': 'He was faithful to Science in his lifetime and has been wholly vindicated by Science since his death.'

None of which is true.

Darren Naish points out that

> If we look critically at descriptions of the kraken, it isn't ever squid-like at all. In fact, it proves difficult to pin down the kraken's appearance given that different authors provide such diverse descriptions.

Alfred Lord Tennyson's marvellous poem 'The Kraken', first published in 1830, confirms Naish's point. Tennyson explained the inspiration for his poem, saying 'See the account which Erik Pontoppidan, the Norwegian bishop, born 1698, gives of the fabulous sea-monster, the Kraken.' In the poem the kraken is a strangely inert creature, formless but of massive dimensions. It lies in the depths of the deepest sea, 'Battening upon huge seaworms in his sleep'. It will only be roused from its stupor on the Day of Judgement, when it will be forced to the surface to die. Ironically the apocalyptic flavour of Tennyson's poem parallels the folklore of Scottish lake monsters whose appearance at the surface also presages death. These are cultural archetypes and exercises of the imagination, not – as culturally innocent cryptozoologists insist – slightly displaced projections of biological realities.

Rupert Gould gives a wholly misleading account of the development of modern knowledge of the giant squid. The animal was never 'an old wives' tale'. The problem lay in understanding it from the tangible evidence of dead and decomposing bodies, or scraps such as tentacles or disarmed bodies. Gould's account of the *Alecton* squid is a travesty. The crew actually succeeded in bringing back the tail section, which was duly described in a French scientific journal. The existence of the giant squid was well known to the crews of whaling ships and Melville described 'the great live squid' vividly in *Moby-Dick* (1851):

> A vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length and breadth, of a glancing cream-colour, floating on the water, innumerable long arms radiating from its centre, and curling and twisting like a nest of anacondas, as if blindly to catch at any hapless object within its reach.

Five years later the Danish scientist Japetus Steenstrup named the giant squid *Architeuthis*, by which classification it remains known today.

Gould's suggestion that the Americans Harvey and Verrill overturned a sceptical scientific establishment is without foundation. Carl Linnaeus included a gigantic squid-like creature among the species listed in his *Systema Naturae* (1735), remarking, 'It is said to inhabit the seas of Norway, but I have not seen this animal.' It was removed from later editions not from dogmatic scepticism but simply because the evidence for its existence remained equivocal. To accept as real any species based simply on eye-witness evidence would have meant including the dragon,

the phoenix, the unicorn and the mermaid.

Progress in understanding the giant squid required specimens to study. It was not until 1871 that the first giant squid was captured in American waters. Harvey and Verrill benefited from the fact that during the 1870s in Newfoundland numerous giant squid washed ashore or were seen floating at the surface. This exceptionally rare event afforded excellent opportunities to study this elusive creature. In September 1877 a storm washed a living giant squid ashore. It was the biggest specimen yet found and was in almost perfect condition. Harvey and Verrill were exemplary investigators and enlarged knowledge of the creature but they cannot be credited with putting the giant squid on the map.

Pierre Denys de Montfort, on the other hand, was a purveyor of patriotic falsehoods. He claimed that six men-of-war captured from the French by Admiral Rodney in April 1782, together with four British ships, were attacked by colossal *poulpe* whose tentacles dragged all ten vessels under the sea. Henry Lee checked out de Montfort's amazing story and established that it was entirely bogus. Four English ships sank during a severe gale and one was sunk by two French frigates. No vessels were attacked and sunk by giant sea creatures with tentacles. Lee concluded: 'His pretended history, as well as his ingenious, but disingenuous theory, was drawn from his imagination; and the one is as false as the other is absurd.'

Rupert Gould tried to enlist the giant squid as an ally in making his case for the Loch Ness Monster. To Gould the Monster not only existed but could also be identified: 'That it is of the "sea-serpent" type, I consider to be demonstrated.' But his claim that scientists treated the crew of the *Alecton* as 'victims of some form of mass-hallucination' is without foundation. After all, they brought home the tail of a giant squid – a tangible piece of evidence. A pioneering description of the creature was subsequently published in a French scientific journal. One member of the Academy, Arthur Mangin, doubted that a giant squid could exist, on the grounds that it would be 'a contradiction of the great laws of harmony and equilibrium', but he was plainly an individual who put theology before zoology.

Gould's image of a vast, sceptical scientific establishment was a self-serving fantasy. He was incapable of understanding that scepticism and caution are perfectly appropriate scientific responses to claims of a new species which are based on nothing more than eye-witness sightings.

Ironically, the difference between the fortunes of the giant squid and those of the Loch Ness Monster highlights this rather vividly.

As late as 1896 the giant squid still existed in the popular imagination as a mysterious and terrifying creature. In H. G. Wells's story 'The Sea Raiders' a group of them appear off the coast of Devon and Cornwall. These 'abominable creatures' attack boats and tip them over. They even chase people over the beach, hoping to kill and eat them. It is suggested that 'a pack or shoal of these creatures may have become enamoured of human flesh by the accident of a foundered ship sinking among them, and have wandered in search of it out of their accustomed zone'. After committing a West Country massacre ('It would seem that the appetites of the shoal were satisfied by the catch of eleven people') the squid swim off. Wells leaves the reader with the probability that the squid have returned to the same realm inhabited by Tennyson's enigmatic Kraken: 'it is believed, and certainly it is to be hoped, that they have returned now, and returned for good, to the sunless depths of the middle seas, out of which they have so strangely and so mysteriously arisen'.

By the twentieth century scientific understanding of the giant squid was slowly moving forwards. The sea monster washed up on the beach at Scarborough in 1933 was quickly identified and added to the sum total of knowledge of an elusive animal. But the lake monster announced by the *Inverness Courier* in 1933 continues to avoid leaving any physical trace of its existence, giving zoologists nothing to work with.

Writing in 1998, Richard Ellis described the continuing gaps in knowledge of the giant squid: 'Its feeding habits, breeding habits, vertical and geographic distribution, life span, and habitat are all unknown.' At the time he wrote no one had ever filmed a living giant squid in the ocean depths. In the twenty-first century that is no longer the case. Although it lives in a vastly greater volume of water than Loch Ness a giant squid was finally filmed in its natural habitat in 2005 and again in 2012. Knowledge of the life and behaviour of the giant squid proceeds, as science often does, slowly and incrementally. All this is in stark contrast to Nessie, which remains a phantom animal, with a credibility which shrinks still further with every year that passes.

There is a final irony in Gould's identification of the Loch Ness Monster as a sea-serpent. That legendary animal has proven to be every bit as elusive as Nessie and the 'classic' nineteenth century sea-serpent sightings have been discredited as misperceptions of known sea

creatures or other phenomena. One of those who pioneered the sceptical tradition was the naturalist Henry Lee, whose monograph *Sea Monsters Unmasked* (1883) identified some classic sightings as involving nothing more than lines of porpoises or rare surfacings of a giant squid. In his book *The Case for the Sea-Serpent*, Rupert Gould sarcastically called *Sea Monsters Unmasked* 'a somewhat optimistic title'. But the passage of time has established that Lee's scepticism was entirely justified and that it was Rupert Gould who was gullible, unscientific and deluded.

But then, in the end, being a believer means never having to say you're sorry.

5

A Neglected Loch Ness Author

Her buffalo hump
  Begins the amazement of her progress.

Ted Hughes, 'An Eel' (1983)

One peripheral but interesting aspect of the Loch Ness Monster saga is how it impinged on culture. The movie industry was quick to spot its potential and *The Secret of the Loch* was released barely a year after Alex Campbell first advertised the loch's amazing and hitherto unknown resident. Very quickly everyone had heard of Nessie. The Loch Ness Monster became embedded as a globally known Scottish legend. Even serious writers noticed the monster's existence, although few were inspired to engage with it creatively. A rare exception was Ted Hughes (1930-1998), arguably the greatest poet Britain has produced in the decades following the Second World War.

It is hard to make a living from poetry and in 1961 Hughes was supplementing his income with some reviewing work. This seems to have been how he stumbled on Nessie and became interested in the subject. He was certainly the most distinguished literary figure ever to engage with the work of Tim Dinsdale. His review of *Loch Ness Monster* appeared in the *New Statesman* (2 June 1961), entitled 'Five Ton Phantom'. It has lain there ever since, undisturbed. Those interested in Hughes the poet evidently have no interest in such a vulgar and disreputable subject as the Loch Ness Monster, and those interested in Nessie are not known for their literary enthusiasms.

This is a summary of the Hughes review:

> The word Monster inspires disbelief—it makes you think of creatures from myth or folkore that never existed. Could there be something in Loch Ness? Many hundreds of people claim to have seen something, and with one or two understandable exceptions the accounts are remarkably similar, a creature 30-60 feet long, with a black back, that surfaces now and again and leaves a V shaped wake, and can travel as fast as 30-35 mph. Even so, in this context you think of fantasists, drunks and frightened fishermen. Call a thing a Monster and it ceases to exist.
>
> That is what I was expecting from Dinsdale's book. However I found that he had personally interviewed several hundred eyewitnesses, and had also been through the literature for sightings, some of which go back hundreds of years. In one chapter he gives similar incidents from Norwegian lakes and from the Atlantic, some of which, such as the creature seen by a Royal Navy ship in the 1810s are highly credible. Moreover there is now sonar evidence, which shows something moving underwater. The most convincing evidence is that of Dinsdale's own sighting, and of the 25 seconds of movie film which he took.
>
> Apparently, this caused a sensation when shown on TV. Nevertheless, the stills from this film in his book, and the other photos therein, fall far short of unquestionable proof. I am ready, though, to believe that there is something living there, breeding naturally and living on fish. Any creature 30 feet long with a bulbous body must be considered not a monster or serpent, but a form of plesiosaur adapted to cold fresh water, and should be so called, not a monster, next time it is seen. This perhaps would not be more surprising than that whales exist, or indeed that Man himself has evolved from the Cretaceous period to what he is today.

In short, Ted Hughes found *Loch Ness Monster* both compelling and persuasive. He was converted to the theory that the loch contained an adapted form of plesiosaur. As a poet, he was acutely aware of the resonance of words. He saw that applying the noun 'monster' to the animal which people reported seeing in the loch was both a blessing and

a curse. Monsters are thrilling and the word 'monster' immediately grabs attention. The Loch Ness Monster was an instant media hit, in a way that 'Loch Ness fish' or 'Loch Ness amphibian' never could have been.

But monsters belong to the realms of fantasy, legend and science fiction. That they should also survive in a lake just outside Inverness and not be discovered until 1933 was altogether less plausible. Hughes was right: call a thing a Monster and it ceases to exist – or at the very least it invites an immediate scepticism.

Hughes's response to Tim Dinsdale's first book is interesting in other ways. His claim that where the eye-witness record is concerned 'accounts are remarkably similar' is quite untrue, but it is interesting that *Loch Ness Monster* persuaded him otherwise. In retrospect it is also illuminating that the Monster of 1961 was held to be 30-60 feet long and capable of extraordinary speed (30-35 mph).

Just fifteen years later Roy Mackal concluded that 'the best valid estimates for the largest Loch Ness animals are 20-25 ft'. He also believed that the Monster at the surface travelled at '10mph or more', with diving rates up to 5mph. The highest eye-witness estimates of speed, he insisted, 'cannot be taken seriously'. Mackal's *The Monsters of Loch Ness* was a classic revisionist work which failed to follow the logic of its own slimming-down of monster lore. He did not consider *what else* eye-witnesses might be exaggerating if they also exaggerated speed. Nor did he consider the possibility that eye-witnesses who reported Monsters travelling across the surface at high speed might have been actually telling the truth. A dark object, or even half a dozen dark objects in line, can still be seen crossing Loch Ness at speed. They are birds, and without the benefit of binoculars and equipped with the knowledge that the loch contains a multi-humped monster, it is simple enough to make the conversion. Mackal's conclusions sharply contradicted those of Rupert Gould and Tim Dinsdale but those contradictions were not acknowledged or justified.

It is revealing that Ted Hughes didn't understand how long the Dinsdale footage actually lasted (65 seconds rather than his belief that it was 25 seconds). One cannot blame the reviewer. Dinsdale himself never spelled it out. It was symptomatic of the fog of confusion which Dinsdale himself laid around any third-party attempt to get to grips with his film.

Finally, Hughes was smart enough to realise that the monster photographs in the book fell far short of proof. It was the other evidence

which persuaded him of the Monster's existence, not the photographs by 'the surgeon', H. L. Cockrell, Peter O'Connor, Peter Macnab and frames from the Dinsdale film.

By a curious coincidence Hughes's review of *Loch Ness Monster* appeared the very same month that he won the Hawthorden Prize ('the oldest and most distinguished literary prize in Britain, open to all genres, not just poetry'). He won it for his second collection of poems, *Lupercal*, which his biographer describes as 'without doubt [his] best and most characteristic volume of poetry'.

Less than two years later Hughes's wife Sylvia Plath killed herself, leaving him in charge of their two small children and in a state of emotional turmoil. His poetry dried up and he channelled his creative energy into writing children's books. *How The Whale Became and Other Stories* (1963) was followed by *The Earth-Owl and Other Moon People* (1963). That Tim Dinsdale's book had made an impression was shown by his next book, *Nessie the Mannerless Monster* (1964), which was republished in the USA as *Nessie the Monster*. If I had followed the initial advice of the assistant from the Information Desk in the Inverness bookstore, mentioned in the Introduction, this is one of the books I would have presumably encountered.

Nessie the Mannerless Monster begins:

In Scotland is a Loch.
At the bottom of this Loch, in the pitch black,
A monster lives, called Nessie. It is just her luck.
She is about the size of a truck,
But shaped like an old sock,
With a long worm of a neck.

Nessie is 'sick with sorrow' because no one believes in her existence. She puts on a spectacular display at the surface but motorists just drive by, ignoring her. In a rage the monster decides to head south. She is not welcomed in Edinburgh and in Northumberland Nessie is chased by fox-hounds and hides in a duckpound. The huntsmen seize their hounds and flee,

quaking with fear and no wonder
Seeing Nessie there in the duckpond like a coal-black forty-

foot gander.

Nessie marches on into Yorkshire ('the greatest shire', adds Yorkshire-born Hughes) but is disappointed. Everyone is indoors watching TV, except for a little boy who rudely tells her to clear off. Next, travelling through woodland to avoid all the cars, the monster encounters Sir Mimms Culdimple Bagforkhumberly-parse. Nessie accepts an invitation to dinner, gulping down partridges, pheasants, pigs' heads, pike and hare, washed down with copious quantities of wine and whisky. But she then exceeds the boundaries of decorum by eating the cook, the other servants and a settee. Finally she devours her host and collapses on the carpet, snoring:

> All of which proves she was completely
> without manners and a perfect monster.

Further adventures follow. Nessie finds a friendly welcome among marchers on a protest organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, who invite her to be their mascot. She joins them at the front of the march, believing it will lead her to the Queen and royal endorsement of her existence. But the protest ends in Trafalgar Square and everyone goes home. The police direct Nessie to the zoo but when she arrives there all the animals and keepers are terrified. She is advised to try the Natural History Museum ('They have all your cousins there, prettily encased'). But arriving in Kensington, Nessie encounters only disbelief. A 'world-famous' scientist tells her:

> 'Impostor! You are impossible! If you were extinct and no more
> Indeed I would say you were a Plesiosaur.'

But since plesiosaurs died out millions of years ago, Nessie cannot possibly be a living specimen: 'So who knows what you are? / Go away and don't bother us here.'

The naturalists return to their work, leaving Nessie to wander away in despair. Lost in the hubbub of London, with no one taking her seriously, Nessie is at her wits' end. But suddenly a voice cries out her name. It belongs to Willis, a penniless Scottish poet. He is thrilled to see Nessie in London and rapturously kisses her flipper. The Monster explains her sad

situation and Willis agrees to take her to Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen. There, the palace soldiers point their weapons at the two intruders. At that moment the Queen appears on her balcony and asks what they want. Willis explains the sad condition of Nessie's neglect and Her Majesty, 'touched with concern for this gigantic national waif', appoints Nessie the Vice-Regent of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, for life.

The monster return to Loch Ness in triumph. Crowds line the shores on Sundays and the bands of the Coldstream Guards and Scottish Light Infantry play, while Nessie cruises up and down wearing a coronet. Everything ends in triumph:

The scientists come in tribes, for a look.
Nessie invents stories about her ancestors
and they write them all down in their book.
And whenever the Queen visits Scotland,
she visits this Loch,
Then she and Nessie sit sipping tea and
have a really good talk.

In 1960, intoxicated by his monster film, Tim Dinsdale also craved an audience with the Queen, to press the urgent case for royal protection of this rare and vulnerable animal. But he was disappointed. The royal advisers were smart enough not to involve the sovereign in something as controversial, unproven and potentially disreputable as the Loch Ness Monster. Besides, there was always something faintly comical about monster enthusiasts passionately demanding protection for an animal which they themselves could never get close to.

Oddly, Ted Hughes also fantasized about the monster and Her Majesty. After first seeing the illustrations for *Nessie the Mannerless Monster* by Gerald Rose, Hughes dreamed of 'making love to the Queen on a carpet in the palace. – This assoc[iation] with the illustrations to Nessie which I saw yesterday, when Nessie, after eating Sir etc, lies on carpet.' (In fact no illustration of Nessie lying on the carpet was used in the published book.)

Years later Ted Hughes took his two children and his second wife on a camping trip to northern Scotland, which included a visit to Loch Ness. They had 'quirky encounters (though not, he regretted, with the Loch

Ness monster)'. His less enamoured daughter remembered only 'a mildewed tent at the lake's edge' and the ticks which attached themselves to the family dog.

Perhaps it was no surprise that Hughes should find the monster believable and make at least one pilgrimage to the loch in the hope of seeing it for himself. One of his finest poems is 'Pike', which describes a pond built by monks in the Middle Ages, which is of 'legendary depth':

It was as deep as England. It held
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old
That past nightfall I dared not cast

The poem ends with a chilling vision of something dark and monstrous rising slowly to the surface.

A Nessie sceptic, however, might point to Hughes's poem 'An Otter'. If the Arthur Grant land sighting was genuine then an otter is a likely explanation for the creature he saw flash across in front of him that moonlit night near Abriachan.

Underwater eyes, an eel's
Oil of water body, neither fish nor beast is the otter:
Four-legged yet water-gifted, to outfish fish;
With webbed feet and long ruddering tail
And a round head like an old tomcat.

Another creature which moves on and in water as well as on land, and which certainly accounts for some Nessie sightings, is that bird which Hughes described so well in his poem 'A Cormorant'. Hughes describes watching one fish. At first it displays a 'Body snake-low - sea-serpentish'. Then it plunges after its prey:

He sheds everything from his tail end
Except fish-action, becomes fish,

Disappears from bird,
Dissolving himself

Into fish, so dissolving fish naturally

Into himself.

Three years ago I talked to a resident of Bracorina, overlooking monster-haunted Loch Morar. Her house had a spectacular view across the loch, beyond the string of islands which separate the shallow end from the main body of the loch. Over forty years earlier I had watched the loch from the Loch Morar Survey viewing point just beyond the islands, a little to the west of her house. In twenty years she had never seen the monster. But there was one occasion when her heart leapt. A terrific commotion suddenly broke out on the loch surface. Was it Morag?

A pair of binoculars quickly established the source of the disturbance. It was a cormorant, which had seized a very sizeable salmon. The salmon declined to be swallowed and was energetically trying to wriggle free. The cormorant refused to let go. The two adversaries fought it out on the loch surface, creating a terrific commotion. The disturbance continued until the battling bird and fish disappeared from view beyond a headland.

Without the benefit of binoculars that might well have been chalked up as a sighting of Morag, the Loch Morar monster.

There is one other poem by Ted Hughes which intrigues me. 'An Eel' appeared in his 1983 collection *River*. It's a meditative poem about a strange creature (the second word of the poem is 'strange'), which Hughes defines as

> The river within the river and opposite -
> The night-nerve of water.

In 1954 Maurice Burton published *Living Fossils*, which included a chapter on 'Monsters and Mystery Animals'. Although the book was largely concerned with conventional zoology, Burton explained that he found the case for the sea-serpent and the Loch Ness Monster compelling:

> The evidence includes a welter of optical illusions, practical jokes, hoaxes and imperfect observations, yet, when all these are dismissed, there remains a hard core of detailed descriptions by competent observers which cannot be lightly put aside. There is another striking thing: that the evidence for both the sea-serpent and the Loch Ness Monster is remarkably similar in all particulars. Both refer to a

> moving object – a living beast presumably – of considerable length, moving at speed, and remaining at the surface for a short time only, during which the most distinctive feature is a series of humps showing above the waterline.

But, though a believer, Burton was troubled by the animal's physiology:

> There is nothing in the more reliable stories that is beyond belief except those humps. They form the big obstacle for the zoologist, who rightly points out that it is highly unlikely that a beast of such dimensions could produce the vertical undulations in its spine necessary to give this effect.

Burton believed that the existence of an eel of giant proportions might well explain sightings of sea-serpents and the Loch Ness Monster. Eels can live in both salt and fresh water. They are capable of raising their heads out of the water. They are bottom dwellers, only rarely rising to the surface. Conger eels can swim surprisingly fast. But there was still the problem of that line of humps.

Burton went to the Aquarium at London Zoo to maintain surveillance of its large tank of conger eels. It contained half a dozen eels, some five feet in length. For half an hour nothing happened. Then, gradually, some of the eels came to life and could be seen undulating their bodies. One eel glided close to the surface and swam along with nine inches of its tail protruding vertically above the water: 'A larger eel doing this, with 6 ft. of its tail erect above the surface of the sea, would produce an appearance difficult to interpret, or to have believed.' Later Burton witnessed a 5 ft. conger rise suddenly to the surface, where it 'turned on its side, and undulated its body violently, causing a flurry of water and a series of humps above the water-line'.

Burton later embraced the plesiosaur theory, followed by an unknown species of giant otter. His eel theory was revived by Roy Mackal who, though he favoured 'a giant aquatic amphibian, probably some evolutionary descendant of an embolomer', accepted the secondary possibility that the Loch Ness Monster was some new kind of giant 'thick-bodied eel'. Mackal also observed eel behaviour at an aquarium and saw a conger displaying at the surface for half an hour 'a vertical flexure about midway between the beginning of the dorsal fin and the tip of the snout',

which, if the scale was magnified, would match the 'upturned boat' Nessie reported by some eye-witnesses. Mackal also reproduced a drawing from *World Book Encyclopedia* showing an eel at the surface with the posterior dorsal surface breaking water in a 'double-hump aspect'.

This makes me wonder if a believer like Ted Hughes read a copy of *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (1976) and transferred his allegiance from the plesiosaur to the giant eel. What do intrigue me are the lines from 'An Eel' used as the epigraph to this chapter:

> Her buffalo hump
> Begins the amazement of her progress.

There is, perhaps (consciously or unconsciously), a residue of memory at work here. Twenty years earlier Hughes had read and reviewed *Loch Ness Monster*. In it Dinsdale described watching and then filming an amazing hump which reminded him of 'the back of an African buffalo'. Hughes's lines seem to re-enact that moment when 'abruptly, it began to move'. Dinsdale's monster progressed across the loch, leaving him 'Awestruck'. The eel in Hughes' poem is, momentarily, Tim Dinsdale's Loch Ness Monster – a startling and amazing creature which jerks into life and moves across the loch surface. The word 'progress' invokes the sixteenth century meaning of a royal tour – a vast, slow-moving stately spectacle in which the divine left the royal domain to meet the common people. All of this resonates with the monster myth. Having seen for himself 'that huge, miraculous creature', Dinsdale wrote, 'I will never let go'.

Perhaps Ted Hughes could never quite let go of Nessie either. Once smitten, the romance never ends.

6

A Note on Orwell and the Monster

It was only recently that witchcraft could be seriously studied, because it was only recently that the 'supernatural' explanation of it could be finally rejected. So also with the poltergeist, so long accepted as a real ghost or laughed at as an old wives' story. It is probably neither, but a rare and interesting form of insanity. When it has been further studied it will probably, like spiritualism, teach us a little more about hallucination and group-psychology.

George Orwell, 'Poltergeists' (1940)

In May 1949 George Orwell corrected the proofs to his new novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He was a sick man, dying of tuberculosis, and he had less than a year to live. That same month, lying in bed at the Cotswold Sanatorium, Cranham, Gloucestershire, he also found the time to read some Rupert Gould.

It was plainly not the first Gould title that Orwell had read, since nine years earlier he alluded knowingly to 'Lieutenant-Commander Gould's collections of curiosities'. Orwell doesn't identify the books he means but probably he was referring to *Oddities: A Book of Unexplained Facts* (1928) and *Enigmas: Another Book of Unexplained Facts* (1929) rather than *The Case for the Sea-Serpent* (1930) or *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934). These last two books are individual case studies rather than anthologies.

That Orwell should have been interested in Gould's collections of

unsolved mysteries is less surprising than it might seem from the novelist's popular reputation as a plain-speaking man devoted to politics and the menace of totalitarianism. He was in fact deeply superstitious. As a schoolboy he read Aleister Crowley and he was keenly interested in the occult. Together with another boy, Orwell fashioned an image in wax of another pupil, snapping off the leg. That pupil then broke his leg and later died of leukaemia, leaving Orwell and his associate rather shaken by the power of magic.

When Orwell returned from five years' service in the Empire as a colonial police officer he came back displaying tattoos on his knuckles which he'd acquired in Burma. They were reputed to offer protection against snakes, bullets and evil spirits. Perhaps they worked: when Orwell was later shot through the neck while fighting in the Spanish Civil War his injury turned out not to be fatal.

Orwell had a strange experience in the Suffolk village of Walberswick in the summer of 1931. The church of St Andrew is built within the ruins of a much bigger church which once occupied the site. Orwell was sitting by the base of a ruined window arch at the east end. Behind him were the open, empty spaces of the old, roofless church. Glancing back over his shoulder Orwell became aware of a figure moving past the east wall of the new church. He paid no attention to this person but received the impression it was a small, stooping man, dressed in lightish brown clothing. He assumed it was a workman. In passing the man seemed to glance across at Orwell. The stranger disappeared from view behind the intervening masonry of the ruined church.

A few seconds later it occurred to Orwell that the man had made no noise. Intrigued, he followed the man out into the churchyard only to discover that he had vanished. The churchyard was empty. Neither of the two people in the road beyond resembled the figure he'd seen. Some twenty seconds had passed. Orwell then went inside St Andrew's. The only people in the church were the vicar, dressed all in black, and a workman who had been noisily sawing wood throughout the episode. The carpenter was too tall to have been the figure Orwell had seen. He concluded that the small, stooping man had simply vanished into thin air.

The clear implication of the anecdote is that Orwell had seen a ghost, presumably a monk or some other person associated with the ruined church in its heyday in the fifteenth century. But having narrated in some detail this experience, complete with a sketch, Orwell then briskly

dismissed it as 'Presumably an hallucination'. Orwell included a sketch of the church and its surroundings, marking the route taken by the ghost. The site can still be visited today, more or less unchanged from the day that Orwell had an apparently paranormal experience. Orwell was plainly drawn to the paranormal and the outré. When he received a review copy of Sacheverell Sitwell's *Poltergeists* he corresponded with the author, telling him of another strange episode which had occurred at Walberswick.

Even the pseudonym 'George Orwell' testified to the writer's fear of the unknown. As Eric Blair explained to his friend Richard Rees, he needed to conceal his name when he published books because 'How can you be sure your enemy won't cut it out and work some sort of black magic on it?'

It's no surprise, then, that George Orwell read at least one of Gould's collections of mysteries. But though he testified to their 'charm' he added the stinging qualification that it was 'the charm of useless knowledge'. In short, though interested in the occult and the mysterious, George Orwell retained a strong streak of scepticism.

It was shared by Sachaverell Sitwell, whose book about poltergeists so fascinated Orwell. The case that fascinated Orwell involved a Presbyterian minister who married a widow with four children aged between three and sixteen. The house was disturbed by a frenzy of poltergeist activity, which included apparent assaults on the two oldest children. Sitwell was inclined to locate the source of the disturbance in the children, but as he concluded: 'should all this trickery be unmasked as the work of Harry and his sister of sixteen, does it, we may ask, make the mystery less mysterious?'

It's a conclusion no less applicable to the Loch Ness saga, involving both transparent fraudsters and those who sincerely claim to have had experiences which cannot ever be convincingly captured by a camera. That strange mental border country which lies between ambition and desire as it becomes cloudy with self-deception or the deception of others was vividly illuminated by the case of would-be round-the-world yachtsman Donald Crowhurst. He was a hoaxer but he did not begin as one. In their classic account of his descent into madness Nicolas Tomalin and Ron Hall point to the moment when his swerve into deception shifted a gear to become self-deception: 'under great strain, delusion was beginning to replace conscious fraudulence. Crowhurst had thought so

hard about his pretended positions and pretended course that he began to experience them completely.'

Curiously, on his final tape recording, Crowhurst's mind turned to monsters. He insisted that physically he was 'tremendously fit' and 'in tremendous shape'. But his mind was troubled:

> The Kraken – who wrote *The Kraken Wakes*? I can't remember now – but I wish people wouldn't go in for stories like that, you know, about the sea. You lie in your bunk at night…and there's a deep subliminal fear that something unknown [is] lurking about waiting for this moment to make its presence known – the Kraken! Unheard of terrible things that lurk in the depths waiting for Crowhurst and his trimaran! Of course, you laugh. Ha, ha, you say. Ha, ha, ha. But it doesn't dispel that dark, uneasy feeling in the pit of your soul.

Human psychology and the subjectivity of human perception have never interested those who believe in the Loch Ness Monster. They stoutly insist on the objectivity of the individual eye-witness. The case for the Monster is always in essence an assemblage of sightings, with Rupert Gould producing the first inventory.

Sadly, there is no evidence that George Orwell ever looked at Gould's books on the sea serpent and the Loch Ness Monster (although one never knows – long lost letters continue to turn up). And the work by Rupert Gould which Orwell was reading at the Cotswold Sanatorium in May 1949 was *The Story of the Typewriter* rather than anything to do with monsters.

But though Orwell never mentions the Loch Ness Monster anywhere in the twenty volumes of his *Complete Works*, he was plainly aware of its existence. In 1934 he was convalescing at his parents' home, Montague House, 36 High Street, Southwold. He occupied his time writing a blistering satire on the town, entitled *A Clergyman's Daughter*. It's a topical novel, rooted in the year 1934. Its first chapter fictionalises a local Suffolk by-election which was held in February 1934.

The novel's heroine suffers a nervous collapse and flees town. Although she's a young woman of irreproachable virtue a malicious rumour is spread that she has scandalously run off with a married man. The popular press turns this into a lip-smacking, risqué national news

story. However, it eventually runs its course and the media is obliged to look elsewhere for a sensational story. Orwell tells the reader that the press switched its attention to 'a plesiosaurus that had been seen at the mouth of the Thames'.

Here Orwell unmistakeably alludes to the media frenzy surrounding the so-called 'Surgeon's photograph' in the *Daily Mail*, which splashed the amazing image of a strange long-necked animal across its front page on 21 April 1934. This became Nessie's defining image for decades and popularised the notion that the Monster was a plesiosaurus.

Orwell mocking reference to a plesiosaurus at the mouth of the Thames indicates that where Nessie was concerned he was plainly a sceptic.

Orwell's father, Richard Blair, died in 1939. He had never approved of his son's decision to give up a good career in the imperial police to become a writer, but as Orwell confided to his friend Richard Rees:

> They were reconciled before his father's death as Orwell told me with deep satisfaction, adding that he himself had closed his father's eyes in the traditional way by placing pennies upon the eyelids. He further added that after the funeral he had been embarrassed to know what to do with the pennies. 'In the end I walked down to the sea and threw them in. Do you think some people would have put them back in their pocket?'

If you follow the route that Orwell took from Montague House down Southwold High Street to the market place and on down East Street you reach a flight of steps leading down to the beach. Beside these steps you will nowadays find a coin-operated telescope bearing the words: CAN YOU SEE THE SEA MONSTER?

Some twenty-three years after Orwell passed this way Mrs Trude Bryant was gazing out across the water from Southwold seafront when she saw a moving object, between 20 and 30 feet in length, 'travelling at a tremendous pace towards the pier'. It passed out of sight but some years later, reading Tim Dinsdale's *Loch Ness Monster*, she was struck by the resemblance between what she'd seen and one of the illustrations in that book – a line of eight humps, identical in size and shape. She contacted

the author, who was fascinated to learn that a Suffolk sea monster should also display 'the multi-hump body shape sometimes exhibited by our old chum in Loch Ness'.

Dinsdale would have been even more thrilled had he known that this was not the first monster sighting in the sea off Southwold. In October 1938 two local trawlerman were taking a meal break in a flat calm sea when just forty yards away a monstrous creature thrust its head above the surface, then moved past them at speed. 'It struck up such a wash that all we could see afterwards was its camel-like back sticking out,' said Ernest Watson. 'It towered over us, and travelled so fast that after a few minutes it was out of sight. It was going more than forty miles an hour.' His companion, William Harrington ('a former town councillor'), said 'I should never have believed it if I hadn't seen it.'

> Both men have fished in all waters for fifty years, and Watson has been almost round the world, but they were so frightened that they hauled up their trawl and made for home.

The publicity produced a further news report which revealed that earlier, on 26 September, the Reverend R. N. Pyke and his wife had also seen a sea monster when they were 'standing outside their home, gazing out to sea'. They decided to keep it to themselves. A local van driver revealed that he 'almost ran over a thing like a huge alligator on the main Yarmouth-Southwold road one night'.

Locals dubbed the monster 'Alfred', for reasons unknown.

What George Orwell, who left Southwold in 1934 and only ever returned on brief visits, would have made of any of this is open to debate. But it may be relevant that in reviewing *Phantom Fame*, a memoir by the American publicist Harry Reichenbach, Orwell dryly noted how 'Reichenbach once gave publicity to a restaurant by putting in the window a bowl of water labelled "The only living Brazilian invisible fish". ' Crowds flocked to see them.

Orwell thought that this was an anecdote well worth repeating for the light it threw on 'the modern mind'.

7

Monster Books: The Top Ten

I am not yet certain of the ending.

Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (Fourth Edition)

In a world suffering from Loch Ness Monster information overload, where should an absolute beginner begin? As far as hard copy literature is concerned, these are surely the ten books that are essential reading for anyone seriously interested in the subject.

(1) R. T. Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934)

To Rupert Gould goes the credit for inventing a genre. Gould laid down the template: an introduction to the geography of Loch Ness, the amazing evidence for a monster there as proved by eye-witness sightings and remarkable photographs, with a conclusion dismissing sceptical explanations and identifying what kind of unknown animal the monster was likely to be.

By the time the book came out Nessie mania seemed to have peaked (at any rate there was no second edition in Gould's lifetime). In many ways it's quite a dull read, constructed around a lengthy inventory of sighting reports, and it doesn't help that Gould padded it out with two extra chapters and an appendix devoted to sea monsters. But no one can deny its importance as the subject's founding text.

(2) Constance Whyte, *More Than a Legend: The Story of the Loch Ness Monster* (1957)

The most influential book ever written on the subject. The monster had been in a coma since 1934. Mrs Whyte brought it back to life, inspiring a new generation of monster hunters. Whyte calmly and with great authority explained that Loch Ness had been a remote place until 1933 and that there was a taboo among the locals which deterred them from mentioning the Monster. She brought the sightings record up to date, adding some sensational new ones, including Greta Finlay's close encounter. She also added two remarkable new photographs to the record. Whyte suggested that monsters had existed in Loch Ness for centuries and that the animals probably also existed in other Highland lochs. The impact it had on its readers is fairly summed up by this comment: 'No one who reads her book can end with the slightest doubt that the monster really exists, and that it shows itself with a fair degree of frequency.'

Constance Whyte urged 'a thorough scientific investigation' and made a few modest suggestions of her own. My favourite one is that 'the creature's reaction to electric currents could be tried'.

(3) Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (1961)

In a little over two years Dinsdale moved from being a man who'd never been interested in Nessie to someone who'd become a zealous believer, had travelled to Loch Ness and seen and filmed the monster, and had written a classic book on the subject.

It was the first monster book to be written by someone who had actively gone Monster-hunting and it provides invaluable insights into Dinsdale's character and motivation. The first edition included a sensational close-up photograph by Peter O'Connor as well as a very revealing account of the circumstances in which Dinsdale took his legendary film.

The book remained in print in the author's lifetime and went through a number of changes. By the fourth edition O'Connor's picture had vanished, along with all mention of the photographer's unnervingly close encounter with the beast. Instead Dinsdale had found a new wonder: a

close-up colour photograph of the monster's head and neck taken by Anthony Shiels.

(4) Maurice Burton, *The Elusive Monster: An Analysis of the Evidence from Loch Ness* (1961)

Published almost simultaneously with Dinsdale's *Loch Ness Monster*, this book was plainly provoked by the author's strongly negative feelings about his former comrade-in-arms and his meteoric rise to fame. It's a plodding and somewhat dry book but full of interesting points.

Burton gullibly accepted central myths of the Loch Ness story (a new 1933 road beside the loch and a monster tradition stretching back centuries), and endorsed some of the classic photographs, but offered a new radical critique of the sightings record, commenting that 'the tremendous production of foam so often reported is strikingly unlike what is observed in aquatic animals'.

Most sightings, he concluded, were 'due to mats of vegetable matter buoyed up by gas'. Other sightings could be explained by boats (the Dinsdale film), deer (Greta Finlay) or hoaxes (Peter O'Connor). But a hard core of sightings could not be explained away: 'I cannot dismiss the idea of a long-necked animal haunting the waters and the shores of Loch Ness'. Perhaps the answer lay in a giant otter, some twenty feet long and four feet high; that, Burton believed, would certainly explain the classic land sightings, as well as some of the close-up sightings on the loch surface.

(5) F. W. Holiday, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness: A Practical Inquiry into the Nature and Habits of Water-Monsters* (1968)

This has always been my favourite monster book.

Ted Holiday takes the reader on a roller-coaster ride which begins at Loch Ness and ends with the dragon legends of the Euphrates and the Tigris.

It's partly autobiography, partly a progress report on the great Loch Ness monster hunt in the years 1962-1966 and partly a metaphysical speculation on the nature of the beast. Holiday concludes that dragon

legends are rooted in encounters with Orms, which have always existed. For those who wanted a scientific model he tossed an obscure fossil found near Chicago into the mix. It bore a satisfying resemblance to Nessie, even though it was ridiculously small by comparison.

Holiday blood-curdlingly explained that he was 'impelled by the knowledge that Loch Ness contains nature's ultimate horror'. Nessie's lineage goes all the way back to the Bible. If, as some believe, the Garden of Eden was bounded by the Euphrates, then it seems likely that the snake in the story if Adam and Eve was actually a dragon, i.e. an aquatic creature which was an ancestor of the Orm of the Great Glen.

(6) Nicholas Witchell, *The Loch Ness Story* (1974)

Evidently miffed by the meteoric rise of the upstart Tim Dinsdale, Constance Whyte never produced a sequel to *More Than a Legend*. Instead she handed over her suitcase full of old cuttings, photographs and letters to budding young journalist Nicholas Witchell, who produced this fluent, lavishly illustrated re-telling of the story. Although not an especially original book, it supplied a fabulously rich resource of material for the pre-internet age, and went through several revised editions, incorporating new material. I suspect this title sold many more copies than any other Loch Ness Monster book, benefiting from the marketing muscle of Penguin paperbacks, which were ubiquitous in British bookshops of the period.

That Witchell has now joined the ranks of the sceptics is as remarkable as his continuing silence about the reasons for this change of mind.

(7) Tim Dinsdale, *Project Water Horse* (1975)

A racy and colourful progress report on the great quest, from the golden age of monster-hunting.

Fourteen years after *Loch Ness Monster* Dinsdale was still fizzing with optimism. There was a frenzy of activity at Loch Ness and the Loch Morar Survey had established the presence of similar creatures in that loch too. This book illuminates the human side of this moment of

monster social history.

Dinsdale records how he was 'secretly amused' at the indifference of the scientific establishment, 'with one of the world's greatest zoological discoveries on the brink of confirmation'. This is the last gloriously optimistic report from the battlefront before the bubble burst and the defeated troops went home.

(8) Roy P. Mackal, *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (1976)

The interest of this book lies in the author's account of his field work at Loch Ness and his revisionist approach to some of the classic evidence. Mackal was a serious scientist. Then he discovered Nessie and began a journey into the fantastic. Advertising itself as the first serious scientific study of the Loch Ness Monster, this book is actually an assemblage of cherry-picked 'evidence' and wild speculation shaped by special pleading.

(9) Ronald Binns, with R.J. Bell, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (1983)

The first sceptical book, questioning everything and going back to the murky origins of Nessie. 'Spurious accounts that snare the gullible are readily available. Sceptical treatments are much harder to find. Scepticism does not sell well,' Carl Sagan once observed. In fact this book enjoyed some modest success and appeared as a paperback in British, American and Australian editions.

Scientific American called it 'a model among such studies'. 'The book should certainly be read in full by anyone planning an expedition to Loch Ness,' dryly advised *Arthur C. Clarke's Chronicles of the Strange and Mysterious*.

(10) Gareth Williams, *A Monstrous Commotion* (2015)

This fluently written book retells the Loch Ness story with great verve, setting out the cases for both belief and scepticism (with winks and nudges, which make it plain which side the author is on). Its chief contribution to the continuing saga is the revelation of Sir Peter Scott's

very illuminating correspondence with leading figures in the great monster hunt.

On the negative side, it overlooks most of what has occurred at Loch Ness over recent decades and its conspiracy theory conclusion is entirely without merit.

2. Loch Ness Monster sculpture, Fort Augustus.

3. The Nessie shop at the Clansman Hotel, Brackla, Loch Ness.

4. A Highland welcome.

5. Full-time Monster watch. Steve Feltham at Dores, Loch Ness

6. A monstrous boat wake at Loch Ness.

7. 'The Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition', Drumnadrochit.

8. The ubiquitous Monster. Abriachan Garden Nursery, Loch Ness.

Beinvenue Willkommen Bienvenido Benvenuti ようこそ
The Magic of LOCH NESS
Mòralachd Loch Nis
Welcome to the loch with the monster
Fàilte gu loch an uile-bheist

9. A roadside welcome, showing visitors a Monster with a python-like neck. Lay-by board near Abriachan on the A82 north shore road.

10. Costume warriors re-enact Highland combat from olden times. Just one small part of the colourful Urquhart Castle visitor experience.

8

The Monster and the Unicorn

I couldn't accept something that, from all the reports, added up to a creature perhaps 20 feet long – with a 6-foot neck ending in a snake-like head, a back like an overturned boat, marked shoulder to tail by an apparent dorsal fin – that propelled itself by its tail, sometimes basked and sometimes thrashed the surface but never seemed to come up on any regular schedule at all, unless it crawled out on the land in the dark. Such an animal never was.

Roy P. Mackal, *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (1976)

In the first edition of *Loch Ness Monster* (1961) Tim Dinsdale listed seven reasons why he believed Peter O'Connor's controversial flashlight photograph of the animal at close quarters was genuine. Wearily acknowledging that O'Connor had failed to convince everyone that the image was authentic, Dinsdale concluded:

> But as Rome was not built in a day, it seems that those who photograph the Monster must possess their souls of patience and continue to work steadily towards the ultimate acceptance and understanding of a creature that appears, to the uninitiated, to be on a mythical par with the Unicorn!

Five years later, reflecting on the strange effect which a close-up encounter with the Monster had on eye-witnesses, he decided:

> Perhaps the explanation lies in the sense of unreality – dreaming almost, which affects one when looking at the beast. It is as though

one is looking at a *Unicorn*. Something impossible – absurd – incredible, the blatant flesh-and-blood existence of which has quite a bemusing effect.

Where unicorns are concerned, Dinsdale evidently joined the ranks of the sceptics. But on what basis? The unicorn surely demands rather more consideration than to be dismissed and treated as a mythical animal in the perfunctory fashion of modern 'common sense'. After all, this rare creature supports the arms of England and has an important Scottish connection. The unicorn was adopted by James IV of Scotland and on his accession to the English throne it was transferred to the royal shield of England as a symbol of the alliance between the two countries. Some respect is surely due. What's more, consider the evidence dating back for centuries. Olaus Magnus's *Carta marina* (1539) contains an illustration showing 'the unicorn of the seas' – a creature with a head resembling that of a horse, with a shark-like mouth full of teeth, and a distinctive and substantial pointed horn emerging from its temple. The *Historia naturalis* (1657) includes an engraving of an aquatic unicorn with webbed hind feet. In the background another member of the species can be seen pursuing fish in a river.

Significantly, there is a legend of a unicorn water monster on the Isle of Skye. Meurger, citing a book about Scottish legends, mentions 'the beast-with-a-little-horn of Dubhrachan'. One wonders if the 'water horse' of Scottish folkore was not in fact rooted in the existence of aquatic unicorns. The tradition seems to make more sense when viewed this way than attempting to associate the creature with the large, heavy long-necked animal of Loch Ness. The Monster's pair of snail-like tubes, sometimes reported by witnesses, bears no relationship at all to the single, pointed horn of the unicorn.

Greek and Roman culture widely acknowledged the existence of unicorns. M.A. Lower, in *Curiosities of Heraldry* (1845), quite reasonably suggests that the spike fixed to the head-piece of a war-horse in ancient times was directly inspired by first-hand knowledge of unicorns and their behaviour. J. Guillim, in his authoritative *Display of Heraldry* (1744), reinforces this proposition, noting that the horn of the unicorn had remarkable properties. It was famously 'the most powerful antidote against poison' – a trait noted by highly reputable eye-witnesses, who reported how 'the wild beasts in the wilderness use not to drink of

the pools, for fear of venomous serpents there breeding, before the unicorn hath stirred it with his horn'. Guillim adds an observation which is surely of extreme relevance to the Loch Ness Monster: 'the unicorn is never taken alive'. Numerous attempts to trap the Monster using a variety of baits, as well as cages and nets, have always failed. Harpoon attempts with a cross-bow likewise produced no results. Submarines have been tried but the results were less than satisfactory.

The unicorn, rather like the Monster, lived in solitude, in remote places such as dense forests, deserts and the tops of mountains. 'No man could succeed in approaching it' – a behavioural characteristic very reminiscent of the unicorn's famous Scottish rival. But though unapproachable and elusive, even unicorns die, leaving their horns to be found by those brave explorers who travelled in the most remote regions of the earth. Writing in 1811, Thomas Fuller acknowledged the reality of unicorns. There was tangible proof of their existence in the form of the unicorn horns which had ended up in private collections. They were characterised by interesting diversity:

> Some are plain, as that in St Mark's in Venice; others wreathed about, as that at Dyonis near Paris, with anfractuous spires, and cocleary turnings about it, which probably is the effect of age, those wreaths being but the wrinkles of most vivacious unicorns. The same may be said of the colour, white, when newly taken from his head; yellow, like that lately in the Tower [of London], of some hundred years seniority; but whether or no it will ever turn black, as that of Plinie's description, let others decide.

The same point was made two centuries earlier, by Edward Topsell in his *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607). Even as long ago as the early seventeen century there were those who doubted that the unicorn had ever existed. Topsell established that it had, with reference both to the tangible existence of unicorn horns and the ultimate authority of the Holy Bible:

> Of the true unicorne, whereof there were more proofes in the world, because of the noblenesse of his horn… to the purpose that there is such a beast, the Scripture it selfe witnesseth, for David thus speaketh in the 92. Psalme: *Et erigetur cornu meum tanquam monocerotis*.

> That is, My horne shall bee lifted up like the horne of a unicorn.

As Topsell points out, 'do we think that David would compare the vertue of his kingdom, and the powerful redemption of the world unto a thing that is not, or is uncertain or fantastical, God forbid that any man should so despight the Holy Ghost'.

Not to believe in the unicorn was akin to heresy or worse. Topsell deplored the shocking narrow-mindedness of sceptics, briskly summarising them as:

> the vulgar sort of infidell people which scarcely believe any hearbe [herb] but such as they see in their owne gardens, or any beast but such as in their own flocks, or any knowledge but such as is bred in their owne braines, or any birds that are not hatched in their owne nests

If Edward Topsell was alive today we can be certain he would have a unicorn blog, characterised by a similar lack of civility towards those who dissented from his fundamentalist convictions.

Perhaps he would have done better to cite Hakluyt's *Collection of Voyages*, which includes an account of the travels of Lewes Vertomannus ('Gentelman of the Citie of Rome, in the yeere of our Lorde 1503'). Vertomannus visited the Sultan of Macha, whose lands included a park where two unicorns were on display in an enclosure. They were a gift, sent out of Africa by the King of Ethiopia. The unicorns had horns and resembled colts with legs which were 'thyn and slender, lyke a fawne or hynde'.

In dismissively treating the unicorn as a mythical creature was Dinsdale aware of the historical record? There is an impressive quantity of eye-witness testimony and there are sketches and drawings based on real-life encounters with unicorns. There is the tangible physical evidence supplied by unicorn horns. Lastly, there is the weight of authority. Many educated and eminent writers across the ages have testified to their belief in the reality of unicorns.

Of course, it is true that nowadays reports of unicorn sightings seem to be non-existent. However, it would be unwise to jump to hasty conclusions. If mokele-mbembe still romps and splashes in the remote

Likouala region of the Republic of the Congo, can we be certain that amid the darkest reaches of the jungle the figure of the pure white unicorn does not flash fleetingly by? There is also that other intriguing Congolese cryptid, the emela-ntouka. This single horned beast has been identified as a ceratopsian dinosaur but one wonders if sightings of it do not perhaps involve distorted impressions of a unicorn momentarily encountered at close quarters in a dark glade.

But, for the sake of argument, let us agree that unicorns no longer exist anywhere on the planet. Does that therefore make them creatures of fantasy and myth? Far from it. In his book *Mythical Monsters* (1886) the geologist Charles Gould (who seems to have been unrelated to Rupert Gould) unequivocally asserted, 'To me the specific existence of the unicorn seems not incredible'. He cites many authorities testifying to the geographically very broad spread of unicorn references in art, literature and, most crucially of all, the reports of travellers. Reading through Gould's impressive body of evidence I was particularly struck by the case of Father Jerome Lobo, a Jesuit priest from Portugal, who embarked for Abyssinia in 1622. There, in the province of Agaus, he encountered a unicorn. That encounter bore curious parallels with the situation which obtains between Bona Narrows and Fort Augustus, involving as it did a legendary presence: 'that beast so much talked of and so little known'. Father Lobo encountered the traditional difficulty of the monster hunter: the animal just won't keep still and has a pronounced tendency to flee from an observer. In Father Lobo's words: 'The prodigious swiftness with which the creature runs from one wood into another has given me no opportunity of examining it particularly.'

But he was lucky. On one occasion he had a close-up sighting. It was very brief but nevertheless he was 'able to give some description of it'. The unicorn, he reported, had the same shape as a beautiful horse. It was of a bay colour, with a black tail. Father Lobo heard from other eye-witnesses that the length of the tail varied quite considerably from unicorn to unicorn. Some also had long manes hanging to the ground. Some behavioural aspects were well established. The unicorn was a famously timid animal (just like Nessie). When a unicorn feeds, other animals surround it, forming a defensive wall to protect the unicorn from predators.

Sceptics have long insisted that the unicorn is simply a myth rooted in distorted accounts of travellers who merely encountered a rhinoceros.

Gould ably scotches that theory, citing the experience of Baron von Müller. At Melpes, in Kordofan, on 17 April 1848, the Baron met a vendor of unicorns, who offered to sell him one. The man was well acquainted with the rhinoceros, which he distinguished, under the name of *fetit*, from that of the *a'nasa* or unicorn. The vendor was able to describe the unicorn's horn in some detail, saying: 'It has a long horn on its forehead, and lets it hang down when alone, but erects it immediately on seeing an enemy. It is a formidable weapon, but I do not know its exact length.' The Baron agreed to buy the animal and was duly presented with its carcass. What happened to this precious specimen, alas, is as unknown as the present whereabouts of the skin and horn of the unicorn which died in the menagerie of the Rajah of Nepal, who presented it to a distinguished local Englishman, Mr Hodgson, who sent it on to Calcutta.

Professor Mackal, whose words form the epigraph to this chapter, began as a sceptic, but an open-minded one. As he went on to acknowledge, 'if the evidence of eyewitnesses was worth pursuing at all, some or all of these details [of the Monster's appearance and behaviour] would have to be explored'. Having pursued the eye-witness evidence he was left in no doubt that 'whatever the identity of the animals in Loch Ness, they exist'.

Likewise, the evidence for unicorns is overwhelming and Charles Gould quite rightly concludes that 'even now the existence or non-existence of this remarkable animal remains a debatable question'. To dismiss the unicorn is to set aside a vast corpus of literature testifying to its reality, appearance and behaviour, with an eye-witness record which (unlike the Loch Ness Monster's) really does stretch back several centuries. Gould acknowledged the animal's extreme rarity but suggested that 'the unicorn may be merely a hybrid produced occasionally and at more or less rare intervals'. He tentatively suggested that 'a cross between some equine and cervine species might readily result in a unicorn offspring'.

Charles Gould, unlike the unicorn sceptics, was open-minded and flexible on the question of origins and type. The animal may not be a hybrid form at all, he freely acknowledges. There is an alternative possibility, which is that the name 'unicorn' may simply have originated as 'a generic name for several distinct species of (probably) now extinct animals; missing links between the three families, the Equidae, Cervidae, and Bovidae; creatures which were the contemporaries of prehistoric

man, and which, before they finally expired, attracted the attention of his descendants, during early historic times, by the rare appearance of a few surviving individuals.'

The important word in the above paragraph, I submit, is the one sealed up in brackets: *probably*. Charles Gould was plainly a pragmatist. He was aware that his thesis that unicorns once actually existed was a shockingly innovative and pioneering one. It was best not to assert the case for their continuing existence. But at the same time, with admirable courage, he was not prepared entirely to close the door on that possibility. I have concentrated solely on the unicorn but Gould had an expansive mind and *Mythical Monsters* also presses the case for the existence as real animals of such species as the dragon, the sea serpent and the phoenix. Truly he was a man ahead of his time. In the age of Bigfoot, the Yeti, the Ozenkadnook Tiger, Mothman and other wonders, one strongly suspects that Gould would not have been so delicately and diplomatically reticent.

Sadly, where the unicorn is concerned, Charles Gould cannot be said to have succeeded in persuading the world of his case. Not even the most ardent cryptozoologist seems to believe that unicorns exist today or were ever anything but creatures of myth. When even a man like Tim Dinsdale refuses to believe in the reality of unicorns then truly the battle has been lost.

But the unicorn, it is evident from Dinsdale's own writings, was always lurking at the back of his mind, if only as an example of how a genuine animal wonder – the Loch Ness Monster – can so easily be confused with a mythic one. At the end of his last published book, Tim Dinsdale explained that it was hard to keep up with developments in the hunt for the Loch Ness Monster. So much had happened since his last autobiographical account, *Project Water Horse* (1975), that a new account was long overdue:

> I am preparing a sequel to it, *Loch Ness and the Water Unicorn*. Some of it is done, but the final chapters must await the colour and circumstance of dramas which have yet to unfold, with the inexorable passage of time.

The book never appeared and perhaps those final chapters were never

written. Dinsdale's intention in calling the Monster a 'water unicorn' was, I presume, to make the point that although it was often treated as a legendary animal it was in fact real. The evidence just kept piling up.

But 'the inexorable passage of time' resulted in something else altogether. One year after Dinsdale announced his sequel a new Nessie book was published. Entitled *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, it was a work of apostasy by a disillusioned former monster hunter. It tore the case for Nessie to shreds and devoted a chapter to debunking the 1960 Dinsdale film. Its sceptical thrust was echoed two years later by Steuart Campbell's book, *The Loch Ness Monster: The Evidence*, which arrived at similar conclusions. On 1 July 1987 Dinsdale mournfully wrote that 'Nessie in the 80s has, if anything, been going backwards'. His own faith had never wavered and only his shockingly premature death later that year terminated his involvement with the great monster quest. He therefore did not live to see that the Loch Ness Monster has indeed become as fabulous and fictitious as the unicorn. Serious interest in the possibility of a large species of unknown animal in Loch Ness is over (although of course there is a small, over-heated corner of the internet where passionate, furious belief among devotees continues to thrive).

What killed off the unicorn were both the passage of time and the rise of a framework for describing and classifying animals. At first, as the biologist Peter Hogarth has shown, this framework incorporated legendary creatures as well as real ones: 'Knowledge of exotic animals such as elephants and giraffes was similar in kind to that circulating about dragons and unicorns.' Dragons and unicorns survived as long as the system was based on published authority and eye-witness evidence. But as the conceptual framework grew more focused certain sorts of animal began to be questioned. However, 'Mere collection of evidence did not kill off mythical beasts. Critical appraisal and the exercise of reason were no more lethal.' In the end, indifference was what killed off unicorns and similar mythical beasts: 'Belief in them, rather than being demolished by direct confrontation, simply atrophied.'

Where there is no tangible physical evidence, interest ebbs among biologists. But this can have no effect on those whose belief is rooted in faith. Hogarth concludes:

> Persistent failure to find positive proof of existence (and I include the recent unconvincing photographic evidence of *'Nessiteras rhomb-*

> *opteryx'* under this heading) does, of course, eventually weaken a case: but non-existence can never be conclusively proved.

Non-existence may not be conclusively proved but this loophole needs some adjustment, to narrow it to something smaller than the eye of a needle. That the Loch Ness Monster has no more tangible existence than the unicorn is something that has become increasingly evident over the course of the past eight decades. Daniel Loxton makes an important point when he considers the case of the great Victorian sea-serpent sceptic Richard Owen:

> He rested his case on the negative evidence that no bones or carcass or geologically recent fossil of a sea serpent had yet emerged, on all the coasts and in all the museums of the world. It is often said that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,' but this is only sometimes true. If a given hypothesis ('The world has giant sea monsters') predicts that we should see certain evidence ('Therefore, the world has sea monster carcasses') and we do not see that evidence (for the record, we do not), then that actually *is* evidence of absence.

The war between belief and scepticism can never be resolved, and the arguments on both sides are now familiar. But looking back, it is obvious that Nessie-mania peaked in 1975 when *Nature* foolishly opened its pages to Peter Scott and Robert Rines. It has been in decline ever since.

The most telling aspect of recent years, apart from the continuing failure to find positive proof of the Monster's existence, is the loss of serious interest in the phenomenon.

Atrophy has truly set in.

11. Mythical creature: the unicorn

12. ‘Lifesize’ mildewed Nessie in a stagnant pond. Drumnadrochit.

13. Tim Dinsdale's boat-like 'monster' was crossing the loch from this location at Foyers, where local fishermen keep their boats.

14. A Tim Dinsdale 'Monster' with the same size and shape can still be found on the beach at Foyers today.

15. A sliding rail used to remove boats from the water opposite the location of Tim Dinsdale's 'Monster' film.

9

Charade

Like believers everywhere, she had a way of making her environment supply corroboration.

John Updike, *Of the Farm* (1965)

In his entertaining and informative book *The Science of Monsters* (2013), Matt Kaplan makes a passing reference to 'Scotland, where the Loch Ness monster charade has persisted for decades'.

Kaplan's testy aside supplies a good example of how little seriousness is nowadays attached to the subject. Times have changed in the half century which has passed since Gavin Maxwell related various local marvels from the Kyleakin area, adding, 'we should perhaps remind ourselves that serious scientists are still looking for the Loch Ness Monster'. Not today they aren't.

At Loch Ness there's a thriving tourist industry, with boat trips and exhibitions, but, as the ubiquitous displays of outdoor model monsters and shop-shelf soft-toy tartan Nessies indicate, there's a whimsical edge to this hub of monstrous activity. 'Loch Ness, I believe, is to become one of the most famous places on earth,' Tim Dinsdale once predicted, almost sixty years ago. This was accurate, and he himself made an important contribution to its marketing as a site of public interest. But its fame, he was passionately convinced, would be due to its existence as the habitat of 'perhaps the last accessible remnant of a dying race – of the rarest creatures on earth'. He went on to prophesy that Loch Ness would be a place 'to which zoologists and scientists from all countries will come to

study'. He envisaged 'a national research station' at the loch. Some forty-four years ago Dinsdale was serenely confident that 'one of the world's greatest zoological discoveries' was 'on the brink of confirmation'.

That confirmation has never come. His predictions have not come true. The Dinsdale film is as discredited as the Surgeon's photograph. Large scale scientific interest is non-existent. Zoologists have no interest in what is commonly regarded as a fictitious entity and a joke. There is now no serious, organised pursuit of gigantic unknown animals at Loch Ness by either scientists or even cryptid enthusiasts. What monster-hunting currently exists remains almost entirely the preserve of amateurs – usually solitary males, watching from the loch side, equipped with cameras (and nowadays drones), still living the dream of a close-up sighting.

That dream has now persisted for over eight decades. No doubt on Nessie's one-hundredth birthday in May 2033 a handful of enthusiasts will still be out there, staring hopefully. Almost seventy years ago the formula for success was helpfully set out:

> It can be calculated from data available that if any enthusiast cares to stand on the shore from 8am to 6pm every day for a fortnight, his eyes glued to the water, he has an even chance of seeing the Monster. Should he choose July or August for the experiment, the odds might even be in his favour.

So said Constance Whyte in an early essay on the subject. Some years later she added two more details which favoured a sighting. 'A hot day when there is not a ripple on the water seems to be the Monster's choice… At the same time it seems likely that (except during the hours of darkness when we know little or nothing of its activities), the most frequent appearance of the Monster may be about dawn.'

She inspired a generation with her calm authority and her quiet insistence on the weight of the evidence. But she seems never to have followed her own advice, or, if she ever did, she never once saw the monster. Maurice Burton was the first to point out this glaring contradiction between her serene certainties and the barren consequences of acting upon them: 'there is no evidence that the monster favours the dawn to put in an appearance. Numbers of people, to my knowledge, including my own team, have made a special point of

maintaining a "dawn patrol" without result.' He acidly added:

> I find Constance Whyte's strong views on this point a little puzzling. So far as I am aware, she has made no claim to having seen the monster, although she lived for many years on the loch-side. It would be reasonable to suppose that she had made some special effort to see it and that she had chosen times which, in her opinion, were the most favourable for the venture. Indeed, all the evidence we have suggests that there is no more hope of seeing the monster at or just after dawn than at any other time of day or night, which invalidates one argument so often used in favour of its being animal.

Whyte was also supremely confident about the monster's dimensions and behaviour. In her first writing on the subject she asserted that the monster's neck was about five feet long and normally held vertically. The mouth, when wide open, was in the order of six inches by eighteen inches. The body visible at the surface was twenty-five feet in length, sometimes broken up into three humps each about eight feet long. The monster was capable of moving at great speed: over 30mph and possibly even 50mph. It created a tremendous commotion and foam. 'The animal may appear as a dark spot amidst the foam, or five to seven humps or coils may be visible.' Sometimes the monster appeared at the surface for just a few seconds but at times it was visible for some 30-40 minutes.

Mrs Whyte concluded her first treatment of the subject with accounts of St Columba's encounter with 'some water monster' in the River Ness and mentioned the capture of a sea-serpent at Oban in April 1877. She theorised, tentatively, that 'There are a number of peculiarities attributed to snakes, particularly water snakes, which one is tempted to bring forward when considering the Monster.'

Seven years later her essay was expanded to a book-length treatise. She now spoke with even greater confidence and authority about the Monster's physiology and behaviour:

> When the Monster travels fast the course is either dead straight or on a big curve. When moving slowly a swaying motion is sometimes noticed, and the course may be slightly zizag. Speed varies between 'loafing', 'cruising', and 'dashing' at 30 or more miles an hour.
> ...Maximum diameter is not less than 5 feet. The number of humps

varies between one and seven, rarely more, and it is usually not more than one, two or three; relative sizes vary but the second is usually the largest.

...The Monster sometimes leaves the loch but has never been seen far from it. Occasionally two Monsters have been seen at the same time.

...The Monster has been seen on the surface of the water in every month of the year so does not hibernate, at any rate not in a complete sense.

Three years later Tim Dinsdale burst on to the scene. He had the edge on Constance Whyte. He'd not only seen the monster, he'd also filmed it.

Dinsdale acknowledged that 'all the extraordinary but undeniable shapes exhibited by the Monster' were perplexing, as was the animal's apparent ability to descend vertically. But he felt he'd stumbled upon the answer, believing

the humps might indeed be structural parts of the animal – and that, *in addition*, a large air sac or auxiliary lung might be superimposed on top of them, right down the length of the back, secured internally at regular intervals perhaps.

With the sac deflated the humps would be apparent, as basic triangular shapes – when partly inflated, as rounded humps – and when fully inflated, or the complete bulbous back, blown up like a balloon, giving the animal the incongruous buoyancy it seems to exhibit in this particular posture.

The more I thought about it the more the theory seemed to fit.

In order to capture this living wonder on film, Dinsdale set out his 'Monster Hunter's Photographic Formula'. This boiled down to such essentials as a 16mm movie camera with a powerful telephoto lens, the use of colour film, a pair of powerful binoculars, a dawn-to-dusk surveillance from high ground, and the comradely sharing of results by individuals and groups. Although his own film supplied important evidence of the Monster's existence Dinsdale wrote: 'I hope there will soon be better film to take its place'.

But, of course, there never was a better film and Dinsdale's own 65

seconds of black and white footage is now discredited. If Tim Dinsdale returned to the loch today he would, I think, be stunned to discover how the dreams he set out at the end of the first edition of *Loch Ness Monster* have shrivelled and died. His four books on the monster are out of print and have been for many years. The main exhibition at the Loch marginalises his contribution to the saga, mentioning him only in passing as an example of someone whose Nessie film involved self-deception and misrecognition. What is probably the biggest-selling publication at the loch – Adrian Shine's *Loch Ness* booklet – takes a sceptical perspective and likewise cites Dinsdale only as an example of the loch's capacity to deceive.

And the great monster hunt is over.

To put it another way, the arguments, theories and eye-witness accounts set out by Constance Whyte and Tim Dinsdale were tested and found wanting. The Loch Ness Monster was a phenomenon of the loch surface but large-scale surveillance by teams of watchers failed to result in observations to match those of the classic eye-witness reports and photographs.

Science requires that hypotheses be tested and that test results are repeatable by others. This is where the Loch Ness Monster ultimately lost its credibility. The stunning 'classic' photographs produced by Hugh Gray, R. K. Wilson, Lachlan Stuart, Peter O'Connor and Peter Macnab were never repeated by any other photographers. Tim Dinsdale was unable to replicate his 1960 motion film and no one else could either. The marvellous land sightings of the Spicers, Arthur Grant and Margaret Munro were never experienced by anyone else. The sensational underwater flipper photographs obtained by the so-called 'Academy of Applied Science' have never been repeated. The extraordinary close-up sightings of John MacLean in 1938 and Greta and Harry Finlay in 1952 did not happen to others in later years.

A fortnight's dedicated surveillance was enough to offer a reasonable chance of at least one sighting of the beast, suggested Constance Whyte. But when large scale organised surveillance took place in the 1960s and early 1970s the Monster proved strangely elusive. The passage of time began to indicate that the Monster is a compendium of mouth-watering wonders but those who go in search of them will never find them. Large scale organised surveillance never spots the Monster that eye-witnesses

report or that appears in the classic photographs from Hugh Gray to Peter O'Connor:

> During the whole of the Cambridge expedition's 480 hours vigil, phenomena which might be mistaken for monsters were observed on 16 occasions. Eight of them were wake effects; six were caused by birds, one was an otter and one almost certainly a large salmon. No large fast-moving objects were seen, and only wake effects compared in size with the huge manifestations of the 1930s.

Though the default position of the monster-hunters was that the scientific establishment was blind and narrow-minded in its scepticism and indifference to the evidence and that it was the believers who possessed vision, flexibility and the true scientific spirit of exploration and investigation, the reality was that in the face of continuing failure the case for the monster was repeatedly revised and rewritten in order to maintain its life support system.

Modifying a theory in the face of the results of continued experiment was in itself an unexceptional proceeding. But what was dishonest was that this exercise in revisionism occurred without any acknowledgement that the process was occurring at all. High speed monsters and monsters which created a tremendous turbulence at the surface were quietly shelved, without acknowledgement either of the revisionist process or what it indicated about the nature of eye-witness evidence. This aspect served as a reminder that the case for the Monster had less to do with science than with rhetoric and involved blind faith rather than open-minded enquiry.

Extravagant claims followed by silent erasure – this has been the hallmark of writings about the Monster, all the way from Rupert Gould and Constance Whyte to the present day and Roland Watson. Gould, very influentially, endorsed the extraordinary Spicer land sighting, only later privately disavowing it. Likewise, Mrs Whyte devoted most of a page to the sea-serpent caught and shot on the beach at Oban in April 1877 – a dramatic event involving over 70 local people, including prominent and named members of the community. The sea-serpent was carefully measured and turned out to be, amazingly, exactly 101 feet long. But soon after publication Mrs Whyte wrote a note in the margins of her own copy. She had investigated the report and found it 'to be unreliable'.

In reality the great Oban sea-serpent story had actually been discredited as long ago as May 1877 but Mrs Whyte's enthusiasm for a marvellous tale overcame her critical faculties. The story was an amusing one and deserves to be as well known as classic sea-serpent sightings such as those involving the *Daedalus* in 1848 and the *Valhalla* in 1905. It was a prank which originated in a real event – 'a slight earthquake' in Oban, on the west coast of Scotland. News of this occurrence was sent to the Scottish newspapers but in Glasgow the episode was treated with incredulity. The *Glasgow News* disputed it had ever happened:

> In fact, it would not have the earthquake on any terms and laughed it to scorn. Oban bided its time. Days and weeks passed over, and when the earthquake was forgotten by all but the fruitful breast in which the memory of the Glasgow newspaper's insulting incredulity rankled, this cunningly-devised fable of the sea-serpent was drawn up and sent exclusively to the *Glasgow News*, which printed it with a flourish of trumpets.

In short, the capture of a sea-serpent at Oban was fake news. The episode serves as a striking nineteenth-century example of the media's boundless appetite for weird tales, sensational events and unchecked publicity hand-outs. Alex Campbell's seminal news report in the *Inverness Courier* on 2 May 1933 belonged to this tradition, with its false assertion that 'Loch Ness has for generations been credited with being the home of a fearsome-looking monster' and its highly manipulative and loaded representation of what purported to be a neutral news report.

Quipped one journalist back in 1877:

> It is thought in Oban that this will be a warning to able editors not to speak slightingly of earthquakes which from time to time may take place in the neighbourhood of enterprising watering-places.

But as Mrs Whyte's booklet showed, hoax stories can live on long after they have been discredited. Nor did Constance Whyte draw any conclusions from this episode, even though as a monster story its features were archetypal, with an impressive sequence of apparently authoritative details and facts.

Her enthusiasm for sea-serpents was undiminished. Seven years later,

in *More Than a Legend*, she cited four eye-witness encounters:

> Two appearances are chosen because the creatures described bear a remarkable resemblance to the *Beistes* of our Highland lochs and two others because they occurred off the Scottish coast.

She solemnly informed her readers that 'the Great Sea Serpent…has already been accepted with reservations by the world of science'. But this was wishful thinking on her part. In the twenty-first century the species remains as unverified and unrecognised as the Loch Ness Monster.

When Tim Dinsdale asserted that 'there is clear evidence to suggest [the animals in Loch Ness] are related directly to the "Great Sea Serpent" ' he was right – but not in the way he ever imagined. He made that assertion in the first edition of *Loch Ness Monster*. But by the time of the fourth edition, in 1982, Dinsdale had deleted it, and his final chapter ('Whatever can it be?') makes no mention of the Great Sea Serpent.

It was not the only change. The first edition of *Loch Ness Monster* included two prints of Peter O'Connor's astonishing close-up photograph of the beast, together with over five pages of analysis, explaining why Dinsdale believed it to be a genuine image. One reason was that 'The back of the animal shown is exactly what I saw first *end on* through my binoculars, before starting to film.' He reiterated this point in the book's conclusions:

> The Monster unquestionably exhibits two or three basic humps, and these are sometimes triangular in shape, or rounded like footballs, or seen as a whole row of minor humps – then sometimes not as humps at all but just a big bloated back.
>
> …one day I saw Peter O'Connor's photograph in the paper, and looking at it, the back of the creature reminded me of an inflated barrage balloon. It was exactly like one, puffed up and buoyant – absurdly buoyant, which reminded me of the shape I had first seen on the water *before* I began to film. During those first few seconds the back of the Monster I saw on Loch Ness stood very high out of the water, 3-4 feet above the surface at least, and it looked exactly like the back in Peter O'Connor's picture…

But by 1982 Peter O'Connor had completely vanished from the record, along with Dinsdale's earlier dismissal of sceptics who regarded O'Connor's photograph as 'the incredibly cunning work of a fraud or a hoaxer – the surgeon's picture all over again in fact!'

In place of O'Connor, Dinsdale had a new photographic wonder to display in the final edition of his classic book – the Monster as photographed near Urquhart Castle by Anthony Nicol Shiels.

As the Loch Ness Monster saga moves slowly towards its one-hundredth anniversary in 2033 the reasons for the decline in serious interest in the phenomenon as a still-undiscovered animal seem plain.

Firstly, there is the persuasiveness of the sceptical case against the animal's reality. From the very beginning there were two strands of scepticism. The first was the scientific one, articulated by professional zoologists. In their eyes the Monster had no biological credibility. The second was empirical and was made by local people at Loch Ness, who asserted that they had never previously heard of this supposedly long-rooted legendary creature and who supplied their own down-to-earth explanations for the marvellous animal which witnesses claimed to have seen.

The second reason for the monster's diminished credibility was that the passage of time failed to supply (and still fails to supply) the necessary evidence of its existence. This is always the acid test which exposes improbable belief. Take, for example, one unusually compelling eye-witness.

> To look at the man and to listen to his story you had an immediate urge to believe him. Maybe it was his appearance. He was dressed in well worn, but neat, overalls. He had slightly graying hair and the most honest pair of eyes I've ever seen.

The persuasive individual was found not at Loch Ness but in California. This particular witness was George Adamski, who described meeting aliens from Venus. They even gave him a trip in a spacecraft to the dark side of the moon. In the laconic words of Carl Sagan, where the planet was concerned its '900° Fahrenheit surface temperature we can now recognize as a barrier to Adamski's credibility'. When terrestrial spacecraft orbited the moon Adamski's descriptions of its far side were

immediately exposed as fantasy. Today, Adamski is acknowledged as a fraud but for years he was a revered figure, with two bestsellers to his name.

When, in the Nineteen-Sixties, the Loch Ness Investigation established itself at the lochside, with teams of volunteers scanning the loch's surface, the marvellous photographs and film of earlier decades simply dried up. What lonely witnesses and photographers previously claimed to have seen and filmed was simply not repeated for the LNI's teams of watchers.

That hugely influential Nessie propagandist Constance Whyte quoted Charles Kingsley, who wrote: 'No one has a right to say that water babies don't exist until he has seen them not existing, which is a very different thing from not seeing them existing.' That observation could now be returned to sender, since the conclusion of the LNI's surveillance was inescapable. The organisation *had seen the Monster not existing*.

Colin Wilson commented that 'When Gould wrote his book in 1934 the solution of the problem seemed close'. In fact, the monster faded away. Thirty years later the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau dedicated itself to a multi-faceted effort to establish the monster's reality: 'it began to look as if the mystery was about to be solved once and for all'. It wasn't.

Then came the dramatic underwater results of 'The team of investigators from the Academy of Applied Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, led by Dr Robert H. Rines':

> One of the 1972 photographs showed very clearly an object like a large flipper, perhaps eight feet long, while a 1975 photograph showed very clearly a long-necked creature and its front flipper; this was particularly impressive because the sonar evidence – waves of sound reflected back from the creature – made it clear that this was not some freak of the light or piece of floating wreckage or lake-weed.

But the 'Academy of Applied Science' was a lot less scientific than its grand name sounded. It was not made up of scientists, it had no connection with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and 'Dr' Rines's doctorate seems to have been of the vanity sort, obtained without years of study. It was therefore hardly surprising that the underwater photographs were later discredited as only showing debris on the loch

bed, with the most famous 'flipper' photograph having been doctored. The sonar readings turned out not to be linked to the flash photography and the confident identification of 'creatures' was the imaginative misreading of boats wakes.

But what of the case for Nessie made by a genuine scientist?

> In 1976 Roy Mackal, a director of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau and Professor of biochemistry at the University of Chicago, published the most balanced and thoroughgoing scientific assessment so far, *The Monsters of Loch Ness*. He turns a highly critical eye on the evidence, yet nevertheless concludes that it is now proven that 'a population of moderate-sized, piscivorous aquatic animals is inhabiting Loch Ness.'

But Mackal, whom Gavin Maxwell probably had in mind when he mentioned the Loch Ness Monster and serious scientific interest in it in *Raven Seek Thy Brother*, was not a zoologist. Nor did he bring academic rigour to the subject. He recycled the stale myths of the Loch Ness saga ('the lake has been the site of strange observations for over 1,400 years… Since the sixth century reports have continued to this day'). He did not consult primary sources, quaintly referring to *The Latin Life of the Great St Columba* and describing the saint's encounter as having occurred at Loch Ness, whereas of course it happened in the River Ness. He was won over by the Dinsdale film: 'I could not explain it, try as I would.' He embraced Lachlan Stuart's photograph of three angular humps: 'Together with Dinsdale's film we have direct photographic evidence as to the probable shape of the central back region of the animal.' He was swept away by Rines's underwater images: 'These are the most significant photographs to date of our Loch Ness animal. The credentials of those responsible for the photos are impeccable.'

In short, *The Monsters of Loch Ness* amounted to the usual special pleading that there really, really *was* a monster. Far from being a scientific treatise which was 'balanced and thoroughgoing' and far from turning 'a highly critical eye on the evidence' it was just another monster book. It arbitrarily sorted the good eye-witness sightings from the bad ones and cherry-picked the evidence to arrive at yet another speculative conclusion about the creature's identity.

To the monster-hunting fraternity Mackal's book passed as science,

leaving believers baffled as to the indifferent reaction of zoologists: 'If the scientific establishment was willing to change its mind, this book should have changed it; yet it seems to have made no real impact.' Writing in 1987, Colin Wilson gloomily noted that 'Most people still regard the question of the monster's existence as an open one, and the majority of scientists still regard the whole thing as something of a joke.' But he ended on a positive note. Technology would finally establish the monster's existence beyond a doubt and it would then be 'finally identified and classified'.

Right from the beginning in 1933 there had always been sceptics. Zoologists dismissed the notion of a giant unknown animal in the loch as inherently implausible. Locals wrote in to the *Inverness Courier* to suggest commonplace explanations for the animal which eye-witnesses believed was an entirely new species. Half a century later a new wave of sceptics emerged. These were former believers who had been actively engaged in monster-hunting and who had now lost their faith. My own book *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, published on Nessie's fiftieth birthday, was the first to challenge the orthodox narrative. It argued that the Loch Ness Monster 'tradition' was actually non-existent, that Dinsdale had filmed a boat, that the photographic evidence was an assemblage of hoaxes or inanimate objects, and that the eye-witness evidence was without merit. The Monster was a multi-faceted construction, not a large unknown animal.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved was the first book-length demolition of Nessie. Maurice Burton was three-quarters of the way there with *The Elusive Monster*, but his book contained three flaws. Firstly, he never investigated the murky origins of the Monster in 1933 and the role played by Alex Campbell. Burton was ignorant of the local scepticism which existed at the loch. Secondly, he prioritised his gas-propelled vegetable mat theory, for which there was very little persuasive evidence. Thirdly, he retained an emotional commitment to the possibility that there really *was* a large unknown animal at Loch Ness, perhaps a 20-foot long otter. He believed that the photographs taken by R. K. Wilson and Lachlan Stuart were genuine images by honest photographers.

In fact, Burton's vegetable mat theory had been promulgated some years before *The Elusive Monster* appeared. In correspondence about the Loch Ness Monster in the *Eastern Daily Press* in 1958, J. N. Farrow

argued that 'the rising of gas-lightened weeds from the bottom might produce the required substance and agitation'. However, this was refuted by the newspaper's 'In the Countryside' columnist, who wrote that, although this would be 'plausible enough in a shallower piece of water such as Diss Mere or Fritton Lake', it was far less likely at Loch Ness.

> Masses of weed and mud rise suddenly to the surface in late summer after prolonged warm and sunny weather, when the waters are said to be "sick." But Loch Ness is very deep and steep-sided, with a stony shore, and from what I have seen of it there is no weed growth which could possibly give rise to the periodic fermentation of great rafts of decaying vegetable matter.
>
> The Loch is just a long, narrow crack in the earth's crust, some 750 feet deep, and even the surface layer of its water never becomes very warm. If its sediments ever do gush to the surface the disturbance must come from the sudden upwelling of a great spring or geyser, or gas, originating in the depths of the earth beneath the Loch.

But while rejecting the rotting vegetation theory the naturalist remained unconvinced of the Monster's existence.

> My own feeling about the problem is that many different phenomena have tickled over-wrought imaginations when people have looked out across the drear and often misty waters of the famous Loch.
>
> Swimming deer, floating tree trunks, lines of birds bobbing and ducking – these are all things which have been mistaken for the Monster from time to time.

This common sense scepticism by a naturalist uninvolved in the Loch Ness story preceded by three years the partial revisionism of Maurice Burton and my own comprehensive demolition job some twenty-five years later.

Since *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was published in 1983 there have been no further classic photographs, no movie film to convince anyone but the most ardent believer, and no sensational close-up eye-witness sightings like those of John McLean and Greta Finlay. The thirty-six years which have passed since my book appeared have simply served to reinforce its uncompromising conclusions.

The most recent work of monster advocacy underlines the paucity of the evidence. *Photographs of the Loch Ness Monster* (2019) is the third self-published book by Nessie blogger Roland Watson. It supplies an inventory of photographs, comprising 'classics' from the years 1933-1975 together with the far less impressive productions of later years. The majority are enlisted by Watson as persuasive evidence for the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.

The book is less than comprehensive. For example, the well-known 2011 Jonathan Bright photograph, which I discussed in *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, is neither reproduced nor mentioned. Watson offers no explanation for this curious omission. He has a chapter on the William Jobes Photographs but restricts himself to images obtained in 2011. Jobes's Nessie picture of 20 June 2015 goes unmentioned, as do others taken by tourists in recent years.

The book's format and presentation is shoddy. The index is unreliable (the entries for Steve Feltham, Maurice Burton and Ronald Binns, along with many others, are inaccurate). Watson's obvious struggles with formatting – his third book reveals that he still hasn't yet learned how to inset paragraphs – extend to pagination. The book has 20 chapters but the Contents list goes awry after Chapter Seven, giving the wrong page number for the remaining thirteen chapters. In every aspect this book is amateurish. The prose is clumsy, wooden and reminiscent of Frank Searle's writing style.

The problem with Watson's approach is exemplified by his analysis of the F. C. Adams photograph from 1934. Watson devotes twenty pages to this image without ever once acknowledging that the object photographed has been authoritatively identified as the dorsal fin of a bottle-nosed porpoise. The identification was made by Professor David Sims of the Marine Biological Association, Plymouth, and was published in Gareth Williams's *A Monstrous Commotion* (2015). In my discussion of this photograph in *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* (2017), I remarked:

> Since it seems very unlikely there was a bottle-nosed porpoise in Loch Ness in the summer of 1934 this picture must therefore be identified as a hoax – a genuine photograph of a living animal fraudulently purporting to have been taken at Loch Ness for no other reason than to delude the gullible.

Watson's failure to acknowledge Professor Sims's identification or its implications is characteristic of his book's tunnel vision. He cites 'Renowned monster hunter Tim Dinsdale' who visited Hugh Gray in April 1960 and reported him as speaking with 'complete conviction' about the circumstances in which his 1933 photograph was taken. But Watson withholds from his readers the fact that some twenty-two years later Dinsdale decided that the two dark bulbous shapes at the side of the presumed torso of the Monster in Gray's photograph 'looked very much like hard-hatted divers helmets! Once seen in this light it is difficult to ignore the similarity, which is sufficiently real to cause doubt.' Although Dinsdale couldn't bring himself to accuse Hugh Gray of guilt in the matter there was the clear suggestion of deception. Whether or not one agrees with Dinsdale's interpretation doesn't matter. The point is that Roland Watson should have acknowledged it. His failure to do so is just another example of the way in which he misleads his readers by shielding them from anything which might weaken his case.

From time to time he alludes to sceptical critiques without saying who the sceptic is or where the critique was published. Watson's readers will search in vain for the identity of the person who asserted that 'the reflection is in the wrong place' in the Lachlan Stuart photograph or the name of the person 'regarded as an expert but a sceptic' who criticised the Gray photograph.

Unfortunately the flaws of *Photographs of the Loch Ness Monster* involve not simply sins of omission but rank deception. For example, in his book *Hunting Monsters* (2017), Darren Naish argued that the object photographed by Hugh Gray was 'almost certainly' a swan, 'its head submerged beneath the water's surface'. He illustrated his argument by juxtaposing a drawing of a swan with the Gray photograph. The image used by Naish's publishers was obtained from the Mary Evans Picture Library, 'the UK's leading specialist source for historical images'. In fact, a sharper print of the photograph is available, known as the Heron-Allen version, which is copyright the Fortean Picture Library. Roland Watson scents deliberate misrepresentation on Naish's part. If the Fortean Picture Library print had been used, he asserts, 'it would simply destroy the swan argument'. In the Heron-Allen version he believes a 'curious fish head' is visible. Throbbing with indignation, and adopting the pose of a Hollywood lawyer making the killer point, he demands to know why the 'superior image' was not used. This is deeply dishonest because as

Watson knows full well, his point was answered three years earlier, in a comment placed on his blog on 21 February 2016 by none other than Darren Naish himself, who wrote:

> The reason the publishers used the poor quality image is because that's the one they purchased from the picture library they used. I hoped that they would use a higher quality version. There was no deliberate decision made to use the poor quality one.

I can only add from personal experience that any author dealing with a commercial publisher eventually discovers that there are matters which have slipped beyond their control. I never saw proofs of the photographic plates used in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, so I was not happy to discover when I first saw a bound copy of the book that the pioneering photographs of a deer swimming in Loch Ness and then scrambling ashore had been published in the wrong order relative to the captions.

That Watson is an utterly unreliable guide to Loch Ness literature is demonstrated by his account of Maurice Burton's response to the famous Lachlan Stuart photograph of three dark triangular humps. Watson, citing *The Elusive Monster* (1961), asserts that Burton is 'predictably dismissive of the picture' but 'is vague as to the reasons why'. This is a travesty of Burton's analysis, which was both detailed and sympathetic to the image and its creator.

Maurice Burton questioned Lachlan Stuart some two months after he'd taken his picture: 'My impression, after talking to Mr Stuart, was that there could be no doubt the photograph was genuine.' Lachlan Stuart estimated that each hump was about five feet in length with about eight feet of clear water between each hump. Scrutinising the photograph Burton believed he could see close to the humps 'something that looks like a head'. Stuart had also mentioned a disturbance in the water some 15-20 feet behind the last hump. Burton concluded that 'This would give a total length of 53 to 60 feet'. After visiting the beach from which the photograph was taken, and after taking his own photographs at Loch Ness of objects of known size and known distance from the shore, Burton concluded that he saw 'no reason to modify the estimates of size made by Mr Stuart'.

In short, the Lachlan Stuart three-humps picture received Maurice Burton's ringing endorsement as a genuine photograph of the Loch Ness

phenomenon. By asserting that Burton was 'dismissive' of the image Roland Watson turns truth on its head. Remarkably, Maurice Burton actually described the Lachlan Stuart photograph as 'the most important' of any of the Monster photographs taken up to that point (i.e. 1960).

Watson not only completely misrepresents Maurice Burton's attitude to the Stuart image; he also fails to register the reasons for the zoologist's enthusiasm for it. Burton archly commented that Lachlan Stuart's photograph was of primary importance 'In the light of what I now know'. This cryptic remark was an allusion to his theory that many Monster sightings could be explained as gas-propelled rotting vegetation rising to the surface. For Burton this theory explained many aspects of the Monster's behaviour: why it burst to the surface, created turbulence, changed shape, shot along at speed and then sank vertically from sight. It was a theory which he believed was reinforced by both motion film and still photographs. G. E. Taylor's 1938 film of a shape-changing object was, Burton believed, a gas-filled sheet of vegetable matter. The apparently outlandish suggestion that the object in Hugh Gray's 1933 photograph was a 'tree trunk buoyed by the gases of its own decay' seemed, in the light of all the other evidence, 'a little more reasonable'. As far as Burton was concerned there was 'a reasonable resemblance' between the object filmed by Taylor and the one photographed by Lachlan Stuart. The clues to what Stuart witnessed were supplied by 'the splashing to the rear of the third hump' and the 'great splashing' which occurred as the object turned away from the shore. If these had been caused by a tail or flippers 'some portion or portions of these organs must inevitably have shown above the waterline' but Stuart did not see any. Moreover 'aquatic animals normally – probably always – execute a turning movement easily, gracefully and without splash unless they are suddenly alarmed and turn quickly at the same time as they put on speed'. The clinching proof that this three-humped 'Monster' was not an animal was that apart from 'the unusual behaviour' on display there was a complete 'absence of animal features'. None could be seen in the photograph and although Stuart and his companion were just 50 yards from the mysterious object they 'saw no feature that marked this object as an animal'. By implication Lachlan Stuart's 'monster' involved some kind of gas-propelled debris, but rather more angular than the usual rotting vegetation. Burton couldn't quite get this haunting image out of his mind. It was, he reflected at the end of *The Elusive Monster*, a 'remarkable photograph'.

Few readers of *Photographs of the Loch Ness Monster* will ever discover that, far from being 'dismissive' of Stuart's photograph, as Watson claims, Maurice Burton was actually entranced and troubled by it. He had no doubt that it was a genuine image, taken by an honest man. Knowledge of Watson's unfairness to Burton requires access to the book in question. However, *The Elusive Monster* was never reprinted and never went into paperback; these days it is a rarity.

The example cited above is far from being Watson's only wilful misrepresentation of sceptical texts. He claims that Hugh Gray's 1933 photograph was debunked by Maurice Burton in *The Elusive Monster*. Watson alleges that Burton 'suggested Gray had seen an otter sporting in the water and even formulated a picture to simulate how such an animal could produce the image on the photograph'. This is yet another of Watson's blatant fabrications. Burton made no such suggestion in his book. His sketch of the Gray photograph was accompanied by a caption stating only that it shows 'an S-shaped object, with what looks like areas of foam to one side and vertical showers of spray'. Burton offers no direct identification of what this S-shaped object might be. In the text he cites the opinions of 'various zoologists', who variously suggested that the object photographed by Hugh Gray might be 'a rotting tree-trunk brought to the surface by gases from the putrefaction of its cells', a bottle-nosed whale, a large shark, or wreckage. Burton himself merely noted that the image indicated 'signs of a great deal of turbulence'. Having considered the various explanations (none of which involved an otter), Burton concluded 'The suggestion about the tree trunk buoyed by the gases of its own decay begins to look a little more reasonable'. And that was that.

Watson's misrepresentations extend to my own writing. *In the Loch Ness Mystery Solved* I wrote:

> It would be interesting to know, too, whether Hugh Gray was related to 'A. Gray', another inhabitant of Foyers, whose efforts to catch the monster using wire, hooks, and a barrel were reported in the *Inverness Courier* of 30 May 1933, at a time when scarcely anyone apart from Alex Campbell gave the monster any credence at all.

Watson manages to twist this into the peculiar claim that I was suggesting both men were identical: 'Binns speculates he may be the

same Mr Gray and hence a bit of a practical joker.'

In fact it now seems highly probable that 'A. Gray' was Hugh Gray's brother, Alexander. If true, this confirms my suspicion that the two men were involved in creating the 'monster' that Hugh photographed. This is impossible to prove, of course. Ultimately there are only two possibilities. Either the photograph is a hoax or it is a genuine image of a large, unknown living animal.

In *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* I suggested that it was a hoax and that for a photograph of the monster taken from the alleged site on a simple box camera at relatively close range 'The absence of any shoreline foliage in Gray's picture is slightly surprising.' Watson reproduces a 1930 Ordnance Survey map which he claims depicts the site 'as devoid of heavy growth at the time'. But such maps do not designate individual trees, which proliferate among the stony shores of Loch Ness, and in any case if the Gray photograph was taken from this site with an old-fashioned box camera with a wide lens one would expect the shoreline itself to be shown. Watson contradicts himself by asserting that the available image is 'an enlargement' and 'cropped'. This is pure guesswork. The original image and the precise make of camera used to produce it are unknown.

If the Hugh Gray photograph genuinely portrays a large unknown creature this raises the question why no one else has photographed or filmed anything remotely resembling it in the 86 years which have passed since this picture was taken. This same point applies to all the material in *Photographs of the Loch Ness Monster*. There is no consistency in what is photographed and the spectacular 'classic' images have never been repeated. None of this matters to Watson. Even one of the most preposterous images of recent years – the 'Anonymous 2006 Photograph', showing a small blurry shape over a distant wake – is solemnly treated to sixteen pages of description and analysis. To anyone who is not a zealot with a closed mind Steve Feltham's deconstruction of this image is considerably more plausible than the notion that it shows a large moving animal.

Watson's book is ultimately a symptom of the degeneration of the Loch Ness story, both in its form and content. Presumably he has more publications like it to come in the future, cut and pasted from his blog. There's scope for a future volume on the eye-witness sightings, another one on the motion film, and another one on Nessie theories. The possibilities are numerous. But the readership for this kind of material is

nowadays a shrunken one, by virtue of the hegemony of scepticism. In the Great Glen visitors are most likely to encounter Adrian Shine's glossy tourist booklet *Loch Ness*. In British bookshops and libraries the only monster book on offer is likely to be Gareth Williams's *A Monstrous Commotion*. Neither publication seems likely to inspire new generations of monster hunters.

The third and final reason for the Monster's decline as a credible animal is modern technology. Nowadays virtually all visitors to the loch possess cameras or mobile phones which are capable of producing high quality images and film but no one ever obtains a convincing and unambiguous image of an unknown animal. Every year the popular press proclaims an amazing new Nessie photograph but the image, almost always taken by a passing tourist, invariably turns out to be something distant, ambiguous and usually small.

Underwater cameras are towed through the murky depths, without once ever encountering a monster, alive or dead. Sophisticated sonar sweeps fail to capture evidence of a large unknown animal, let alone a family of monsters. Below the loch surface, what one might call the evidence of absence continues to accrue. Tim Dinsdale was in no doubt that the monster was a carnivore and a potentially dangerous animal which might well attack someone swimming in the loch: 'having seen one of them I would never bathe in the lake – and whenever possible try to warn others not to do so'. In 1978 the remains of an aircraft on the bed of Loch Ness were identified as those of a Wellington Bomber which had been ditched there on New Year's Eve, 1940. For three years the Royal Navy's elite Fleet Diving Group used the wreck for deep water training exercises. In September 1985 the plane was successfully raised to the surface and removed to the Brooklands Museum in Weybridge, where it remains on public display. The bomber was found in the same location as Donaldina Mackay's seminal April 1933 sighting of 'a violent commotion in the water' which became 'two black humps moving in line'. But though located in prime monster territory none of the divers involved in the naval training or the complicated recovery process ever reported encounters with large unknown animals, none were attacked, and no signs of dead animals or animal remains were ever seen.

Above the surface live webcams fail to register the appearance of a large unknown animal at the surface. Monster hunters place motion-

sensitive wildlife cameras at the lochside and leave them there for months but though tens of thousands of images are obtained, not a single one of them ever shows the Monster. Nowadays even night vision binoculars and cameras are available. All they establish is that the Monster is as elusive as a nocturnal animal as a daylight one.

No unknown animal is ever captured on film because there is no unknown animal there. And no serious monster hunter can now ever hope to replicate Tim Dinsdale's experience at Loch Ness on 23 April 1960, because the availability of drones means that a similar mystery object could quickly be identified.

As has been the case throughout the Loch Ness Monster charade, there is simply nothing in it for scientists to work with. And while Nessie enthusiasts continue to insist that the traditional evidence for their monster is valid, scientists are otherwise engaged. Knowledge of the giant squid proceeds incrementally. And in 2010 the Census of Marine Life completed a decade-long search for deep-ocean species, adding over 1,300 new marine species to the total. They include the Feather Star, a marine invertebrate which lives on the ocean floor. This new and as yet unclassified species was found only in 2011. The ocean depths do contain extraordinary and bizarre new species. They include the Hydromedusan jellyfish (*Crossota millsae*), the Spined Pygmy Shark (*Squaliolus laticaudus*), the Black Dragonfish (*Melanostomias melanops*) and the Naked Sea Butterfly (*Clione limacina*). These astonishing creatures make the sea serpent and the Loch Ness monster seem a little banal.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century there is also a new consideration. Currently it is suggested that 'one in five species may be at risk from climate change'. Global over-heating may even cause the extinction of humanity itself. The pursuit of a chimera such as Nessie seems irrelevant and self-indulgent in the face of species-extinction and the apocalyptic possibilities present in climate breakdown.

10

The Land Sightings

Common sense has never destroyed a pleasing illusion.

John Prebble, *The King's Jaunt* (1988)

It was not until the seventy-second page of *More Than a Legend* that Constance Whyte cautiously introduced a new aspect of the Monster's existence, which she acknowledged would leave her reader's credulity 'uncomfortably strained'.

> The writer has taken years to reach the point where the following accounts are not only accepted without reserve, but found to fill some important gaps in this complicated jig-saw puzzle.
>
> One surprise which has to be faced is that *an Niseag* leaves the loch altogether, suns itself upon the shore, and, at times, has been known to travel some distance over-land, for on at least two occasions it has been observed crossing a main road.

The revelation that the Loch Ness Monster had amphibious tendencies was previously enshrined in Gould's book on the subject. He gave two examples but endorsed only one. This was the seminal George Spicer sighting which, when he first read about it, he regarded as 'either a pleasantry or a rather unconvincing attempt at a hoax'. After interviewing Spicer and his wife, Gould changed his mind. He was now persuaded that the story was 'entirely *bona fide*; that they had undergone a most unusual experience which had left a lasting and rather unpleasant impression'. Later, he privately changed his mind again, finally deciding

that the couple had misperceived ‘a huddle of deer’.

Rupert Gould was altogether less enthusiastic about the other contemporary example, Arthur Grant’s sighting of the Monster crossing the road by moonlight: ‘I can only suppose that he either underestimated the size of the creature he saw [from 15 to 20 feet long], or that it was not [the Monster] at all.’ Gould, fixated on the notion that the Monster was a sea serpent, couldn’t accept the possibility of an animal smaller than ‘a probable length of 45 feet or so’. But Constance Whyte had no qualms about accepting the Grant land sighting as genuine, on the basis that she knew him well. He was ‘trustworthy’ and ‘one on whose word and powers of observation particular reliance can be placed’.

Whyte introduced two more sightings from the 1933-34 period of original Nessie mania. These were Mrs MacLennan’s sighting ‘one day in 1933’ of an animal some 20-25 feet long which was on the beach near Dores. There was also Margaret Munro’s June 1934 sighting of the Monster lying on the shore of Borlum Bay. To these four contemporary sightings she added two historical anecdotes: unidentified Drumnadrochit schoolchildren who had once encountered ‘a most peculiar and horrifying animal in the bushy swamp in Urquhart Bay’ and Mrs Cameron’s memory of encountering a strange ‘beast’ which lurched out of some bushes and into the water in a lonely part of the loch shore outside Fort Augustus.

Four years later, in his first book *Loch Ness Monster*, Tim Dinsdale contributed two more cases of the Monster seen on land. The first involved a recent 1960 sighting of the animal partly out of the water on the south shore. The second was an historical anecdote supplied by Alfred Cruickshank in January 1961, who recalled how in the darkness early on ‘a Monday morning in April, 1923’ he had an encounter ‘with the Monster, of which I got a very good view as it crossed the road in front of me’.

The land sightings take us to the heart of the Loch Ness mystery. The central difficulty of there being no record of large unknown animals having been seen in Loch Ness prior to 1933 is compounded by the colourful suggestion that these gigantic creatures also sometimes leave the loch and journey on land, without a single record of a sighting prior to that seminal year. The land sightings are fascinating because they simply underline the problem of eye-witness evidence unsupported by

anything more tangible. Apart from the lack of any photographs of a gigantic animal out of the water, there is not a scrap of physical evidence of the passage of such a creature. The other striking feature of the land sightings is that every single one depends on a sighting by an isolated individual or individuals. There is no record of two separate individuals or groups *ever* witnessing the monster on land.

One might also ask why it is that Monster never emerges at locations where it would be very visible to numerous eye-witnesses, such as the little beach below Urquhart Castle or the beach at Dores. All this is before one even begins to consider such matters as what would motivate a creature of the depths to emerge on to land, and what this would imply about its means of propulsion and physiology. But despite all the problems associated with the idea of the animal coming ashore, the overwhelming majority of believers accept this aspect of Nessie's behaviour. The tiny minority of believers who do not accept the land sightings prefer to sidestep the issue of why we should believe eye-witnesses who see the Monster in the loch but not those who see it on land.

The two new land sightings described by Tim Dinsdale in *Loch Ness Monster* illustrate the basic difficulties of sightings by solitary individuals. Torquil MacLeod, who said he saw the Monster on land on the other side of the loch, was a dedicated Nessie hunter. His sighting seems like a classic case of 'expectant attention' being duly rewarded. It occurred in conditions of poor visibility, with the weather 'dull and overcast, with a drizzle drifting down the loch'. MacLeod saw 'a slight movement upon the opposite shore' some two and a half miles west of Invermoriston.

He focused his binoculars on the opposite bank and saw 'a large grey black mass (I am inclined to think the skin was wet and dry in patches) and at the front there was what looked like an outsize in elephants trunks (*sic*). Paddles were visible on both ends, but only at what I presumed was the rear end, and it was this end (remote from the "trunk"), which tapered off into the water.'

MacLeod watched the Monster for 8-9 minutes from a distance which he estimated to be about 1,700 yards before it entered the loch and vanished. He calculated that the animal was 'possibly 55 ft. or so in length' in its visible section, making it even bigger once the submerged section was added on. Tim Dinsdale mused that this reinforced the case for 'one

creature in Loch Ness which is of gargantuan proportions – the old bull of the tribe perhaps'.

MacLeod seems to have supplied Dinsdale with two or more sketches based on his experience. One, captioned 'I think the LNM looks like this', is of a fairly standard plesiosaur-style Nessie shape (small head, long neck, large two-humped body, paddles) and, as it appears in *Loch Ness Monster*, appears to be the original. The other(s) seem to have been redrawn by Dinsdale, whose graphic skills were patently greater. It displays four postures of the Monster, with rain sleeting down. One of them shows 'lens graticulations establishing scale'.

In my book *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* I argued that these illustrations were grossly exaggerated, since MacLeod simply could not have seen an animal with such detail at such a distance using his relatively low-powered binoculars. I also observed that the object, showing a bulbous shape tapering vertically above the loch surface, bore some resemblance to the 'Monster' reported by Gould's witness, Dr J. Kirton, which was almost certainly a boat. Some thirty-three years later Richard Raynor proposed a different explanation, based on his personal experience. From a boat approaching the location of MacLeod's sighting Raynor could see 'an unusual object, brown and black against the grey rocks of the scree'. It seemed to be at least twenty feet long. Then there was a movement and he realised he was actually seeing a group of feral goats which are now known to live in this remote part of the loch: 'They were spread out in a line starting at the water's edge, with the others slightly higher up the slope.'

It's a highly plausible explanation for what Torquil MacLeod saw. His sighting of a Monster on land was a classic instance of pareidolia, in which the mind picks out a significant shape or pattern from purely random material. Ironically, MacLeod's sighting first came to Tim Dinsdale's ears on the evening of the second day of his arrival at Loch Ness in April 1960. It encouraged Dinsdale to go the very next morning to the location where MacLeod had seen his Monster, where he 'sat for several hours… peering through binoculars'. MacLeod's sighting in turn helped to inspire Dinsdale's sighting, by contributing to his sense of extreme expectation that the Monster was still alive and present in the loch. Two days after hearing of MacLeod's land sighting, Dinsdale saw a Monster at the mouth of the River Foyers. Two days after that he saw his Monster again and shot his legendary film.

The irony is compounded by the fact that Dinsdale also fell victim to pareidolia, converting a boat into a giant hump with a blotch on the side. In short, MacLeod's expectant attention combined with pareidolia to supply him with a Monster, which fuelled Dinsdale's expectant attention, which combined with pareidolia to supply him with two Monsters – one on 21 April and one on 23 April. These are textbook examples of how Monster mania reproduces itself. And of course, as I pointed out in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, Torquil MacLeod's expectation of seeing a Monster was in itself fuelled by Constance Whyte, who suggested that the precise section of loch shore where he had his sighting might well be a favourite spot of the Monster when it chose to haul itself out on to land.

The curious case of the Essex lion which hit the headlines in the summer of 2012 vividly demonstrates how something which is commonplace can be misperceived as a large, living animal the existence of which, once given publicity, then quickly acquires verification from other eye-witnesses who are convinced that they have seen it too. Perhaps the most remarkable of all the individuals involved in that saga was the person who swore he'd heard a lion roaring *before* he ever became aware that there was one supposedly on the loose.

The Loch Ness Monster was famously first promoted as an inhabitant of the loch in the *Inverness Courier* on 2 May 1933. That the Loch Ness phenomena is self-reproducing is illustrated by the way in which the report of Mrs Mackay's two 'blue-black' humps which 'rose and sank in an undulating manner' was followed on 11 May by the Shaw sighting of 'a large dark hump, about 8 feet long' which left 'a big wash, like that made by an out-board-engine motor-boat'. On 27 May Mr and Mrs J. Simpson saw 'two humps, like a pair of upturned boats in line with a space between them'. From a sceptical perspective these three sightings are entirely consistent with people seeing a boat's rolling wake after the boat has vanished from sight. The phenomenon is now a well recognised one at Loch Ness, especially when the loch surface is calm, as it was in each of these episodes. But the Shaw and Simpson sightings, though probably inspired by the report of Mackay's experience, did not come to the ears of Alex Campbell, and so the *Courier* missed them. One month after the seminal Mackay sighting all the newspaper was able to report was that some road workers at Abriachan had seen a monster 'in the centre of the loch behind a passing drifter' (in other words, the wake of the trawler) and a vague claim that some passengers in a bus had seen

the beast a few days earlier.

The final irony of the Torquil MacLeod land sighting and its role in Dinsdale's own experiences at Loch Ness is that both men scrutinised their Monsters through binoculars, ostensibly giving their sightings extra credibility. But the difficulty is that their low-powered binoculars cannot possibly have supplied them with the kind of detailed images which they claimed to see and which are reproduced in Dinsdale's *Loch Ness Monster*. In MacLeod's case, his sighting occurred in conditions of poor visibility, just as Dinsdale's first 'Monster' sighting of 21 April 1960 did. There is also the issue of the witness's state of mind. This can only ever be a matter of conjecture, but it is far more probable that their observation of a 'Monster' was carried out in a condition of extreme nervous excitement rather than cool detachment.

The second new land sighting brought to public attention in Tim Dinsdale's first book was that of Alfred Cruickshank, whose sighting occurred at night. He'd written to Dinsdale in January 1961, describing how the Monster had been caught in his car headlights as it crossed the road in front of him some 37 years earlier:

> Body 10-12 ft. long, 5 ft. 6 in.-7 ft. in height, tail 10-12 ft. Colour, green-khaki resembling a frog, with cream coloured belly which trailed on the ground. It had four legs thick like an elephant's and had large webbed feet, in reality it looked like an enormous hippo, but arched back, as you will see in my rough drawing. It gave out a sharp bark, like a dog, as it disappeared over the road into the water.

A slightly different version of this sighting appeared in Nicholas Witchell's *The Loch Ness Story*. In one striking aspect the animal did not fit the orthodox view of the Monster:

> I saw the outline of what appeared to be the head which was big and pug-nosed and was set right on the body – in other words it didn't have much of a neck.

What is interesting about this case is the way in which both Witchell and Dinsdale adopt the sceptical approach in order to make the sighting conform to their own image of the Monster. Witchell breezily

acknowledged that the differences with the standard plesiosaur-style Monster template amounted to 'inconsistencies' but remarked that they were 'perhaps understandable in view of the poor light and the brevity of the sighting'.

Dinsdale went even further. He even drew the bizarre conclusion that 'there is much to suggest that Mr. Cruickshank's Monster in 1923 is similar to the one I saw and filmed in Loch Ness in 1960'. To arrive at this startling conclusion Dinsdale adopted the standard sceptic's approach of pointing to the limitations of human perception in 'the circumstances, of surprise, poor light, the purely momentary sighting and the passage of time – nearly forty years since the event occurred.'

> My own description of the back of the Monster referred to the 'back of an African Buffalo', but on second thoughts I think I prefer that of a huge hippopotamus! The reddish brown hue visible in sunlight, could very well be a khaki colour by artificial light.

But what about that big pug-nosed head set square on the Monster's body?

> I think it is conceivable that with its body sideways on, and its head swung round … the neck might *not* have been visible, and furthermore, in this position the head would have been nearer to the car than the body, by eight to ten feet, perhaps, thus creating a momentary impression of disproportionate size.

And what about those four legs, thick like an elephant's?

> The legs I cannot explain, but I wonder whether there really is a need to do so? …I know that if I was surprised by a fearsome bull in a field I would not instinctively look down at its lower extremities, and in consequence I would question the accuracy of this part of the description, though not its veracity. Under the conditions prevailing it would probably have been easy to make an unconscious mistake.

This is the logic of scepticism. The interpreter speculates about the supposed objectivity of the eye-witness statement and suggests modifications by relating it to subjectivities of human perception.

It is notable that although Dinsdale was supplied with a sketch of

Cruickshank's 'Monster' he preferred neither to use the original nor to re-draw it himself for *Loch Ness Monster*. Presumably it just looked too odd and not even 'improvement' could ever be sufficient to render it less than a riskily comic contradiction of the conventional long-necked Monster. What are also noticeable are Dinsdale's quiet attempts to strengthen the case for his own Monster footage by suggesting that the object filmed possessed significant similarities not just to Alfred Cruickshank's peculiar land monster but also Lachlan Stewart's three-humped Monster and the object photographed by Peter O'Connor. To those of a sceptical disposition these attempts to find resemblance between three quite different 'monsters' and his own film might indicate Dinsdale's own deep, underlying doubts about exactly what it was he'd filmed and his need to convince himself that Maurice Burton's mundane interpretation of the mystery object was false.

What Alfred Cruickshank saw from his driver's seat that morning can never be known. Like those much better known seminal sightings, Donaldina Mackay's and the Spicers, he was taken by surprise while travelling in a moving vehicle and had a momentary glimpse of something he didn't recognise. In Cruickshank's case his sighting was rendered even more questionable by being made in conditions of low visibility. By the sound of it (assuming that the story is genuine) he may have seen a seal, a sea lion or a walrus. However unlikely those possibilities are, they are more credible than that he saw a large unknown animal. Moreover, he did not write down an account of his experience until almost four decades later, by which time his story had solidified and been reshaped by time and any retelling in the interval. As Oliver Sacks observed:

> We now know that memories are not fixed or frozen, like Proust's jars of preserves in a larder, but are transformed, disassembled, reassembled, and recategorized with every act of recollection.

To the fallibility of human perception and the subjectivities of reminiscence we should add the imperfections of the various Loch Ness primary texts. Whereas these were, most of the time, relatively fluent exercises in the rhetoric of persuasion, the contemporary equivalent displays symptoms of decay and deformation. 'The medium is the message,' Marshall McLuhan once famously observed. Its veracity is

embodied by the first book to address itself exclusively to the land sightings, Roland Watson's *When Monsters Come Ashore* (2018).

It is perhaps the perfect symbol of the decline and fall of the Loch Ness Monster that whereas the topic once provoked books by authors who wrote well and supplied compelling narratives – Constance Whyte, Tim Dinsdale and F. W. Holiday, for example – the genre has sunk to the level of this book. *When Monsters Come Ashore* is a shoddily laid-out book by a self-published author who has dismally failed to master the art of formatting text, who can't organise his material in a coherent manner, whose grasp of grammar is at times wobbly and whose notion of scholarship is distinctly impoverished.

The medium of *When Monsters Come Ashore* is lamentably clumsy. The font is massive and Watson hasn't yet managed to learn how to do paragraphs. Each short block of text is separated from the next one by gratuitous white space. Illustrations are lifted from Google Street View and other commonplace internet sources. Other material has been cut and pasted from a blog, with unfortunate consequences. On a monochrome Google satellite image of Loch Ness Watson has superimposed small squares, explaining 'Deer kill recoveries are in white while Monster incidents are in red.' There are no red squares because Watson's book doesn't use colour. Although the book is 267 pages in length this is because of the giant font and all the gratuitous and clumsy white space. If the content of *When Monsters Come Ashore* was slotted into a professionally produced book it would run to around 100 pages.

The content matches the medium. It is an inventory of sightings, with a rambling commentary. Watson believes that these sightings (fewer than forty, many of them no more than extremely vague unsourced historical anecdotes) lend credence to the notion that on the shores of Loch Ness may sometimes be found 'the largest land animal on this planet'. This would be remarkable if true but raises some rather large objections in terms of evidence and public record. The wider world is unperturbed by this remarkable possibility, as it is too outlandish even to merit consideration. I cannot recall even a populist medium like television documentary ever addressing the issue. Scepticism, where it is articulated, comes from the ranks of disillusioned former believers or from existing believers. In this latter category is Malcolm Robinson, who finds the land sightings 'incredible' and remarks of the seminal Spicers' sighting, 'Some people as we know love to tell tall tales and make things

up either to fool their friends or get their name into the newspapers and the like, was this the case here?' David Martin and Alastair Boyd have also asserted that 'Alleged land sightings must be regarded with some doubt.' Tim Dinsdale acknowledged that an amphibious monster seemed incredible: 'It is something which the majority of people prefer not to believe.'

Watson omits all mention of believers who find the land sightings a marvel too far. Likewise he declines to acknowledge Henry H. Bauer's observation that the land sightings are an 'embarrassing improbability' which has damaged the case for the Monster. Bauer, perhaps the most zealous believer of any in monsters in the loch, cannot bring himself even to mention George Spicer by name. While other Monster enthusiasts find coherence and consistency in the 1933-34 land sightings, Bauer refers to 'quite indefinite and confusing descriptions of what had been seen'. Witnesses of Nessie on land, Bauer states, report 'experiences of the most extremely improbable sort... Unfortunately there is no ready way of dismissing them all as of misidentifications of, say, otters.' *Unfortunately?* Although Bauer sits on the fence, defining the witnesses as 'apparently responsible and plausible individuals', his lack of enthusiasm for an amphibious Nessie is obvious.

Watson makes no mention of doubters like Robinson, Boyd and Bauer, who are not sceptics. Nor does he address the evolving treatment of the subject in the classic literature. He is also not to be relied upon as someone who can accurately convey the viewpoint of other writers on the subject. For example, in his account of the Spicer sighting he refers to 'the theory that the Spicers made the entire thing up and was a hoax. This is promoted by Ronald Binns in his sceptical book [*The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*]'. This is blatantly untrue and an utterly misleading account of that book's treatment of this seminal land sighting. In *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* I drew attention to something that half a century of monster literature had ignored, which is that the *Inverness Courier* prefaced its original revelation of this land sighting with the comment:

> From Mr Spicer's description of the animal, one who knows the habits of otters, says he had no doubt but that the animal was a large otter and that it was carrying a young otter in its mouth. An otter, which is a land as well as water animal, if disturbed would scramble rapidly

> across the road, giving the appearance of having no feet. (*Inverness Courier*, 4 August 1933)

I then went on to comment, 'Whatever it was Mr Spicer had seen, the publicity surrounding his letter immediately gave the monster a new lease of life.' Far from accusing the Spicers of being hoaxers who had made the whole thing up, I accepted that they had seen an animal cross the road.

I wrote:

> Mr Spicer's description of the six to eight feet long 'dragon or prehistoric animal' which rushed across the road in front of him provides only a marginally exaggerated description of an otter. Spicer's choice of metaphor is fascinating in the light of Gavin Maxwell's description of his first glimpse of Mij: 'The creature that emerged…did not at that moment resemble anything so much as a very small medievally-conceived dragon.'

Watson's intellectual dishonesty is exposed by a footnote to his false 'hoax' allegation, which states that Ronald Binns 'may now believe in the deer theory'. This assertion is unreferenced and will seem puzzling to anyone lacking knowledge of Watson's slippery equivocations and evasions in the face of criticism.

Watson's footnote alludes to my book *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, which was published in August 2017. It updated my original demystification of the subject, to take account of what had happened in the thirty-four years since my first book appeared. Among the events of those passing decades was the publication in 2006 of *Time Restored*, a scholarly biography of Rupert Gould by Jonathan Betts. The author revealed for the first time that Gould had re-read his Monster book, occasionally annotating it. Among the handwritten notes was a startling retraction of the Spicer sighting. If he was re-writing *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, Gould wrote, he would have omitted it altogether: 'I think the Spicers saw a huddle of deer crossing the road.'

This was an extraordinary and wholly unexpected deconstruction of a seminal land sighting which Gould himself had done so much to establish as a classic. It exposed yet again the rickety foundations of the standard Loch Ness Monster narrative. I devoted eight pages of *The Loch Ness*

Mystery Reloaded to a detailed discussion of the significance of Gould's retraction and the validity of the 'huddle of deer' interpretation. It included an analysis of the previously unnoticed and undiscussed differences in the text of an unpublished letter by George Spicer cited by Tim Dinsdale and Ted Holiday. Both Dinsdale and Holiday, I argued, had tampered with the text in order to shape it and make the oddity of its contents smoother and more persuasive. This editorialising by Dinsdale and Holiday was, I suggested, characteristic of the Monster fraternity's frequent unwillingness to allow raw material to reach the reader. It usually had to be processed, which was in itself symptomatic of an underlying anxiety. Roland Watson prefers to blank all this out in *When Monsters Come Ashore*. He cites Spicer's doctored letter without acknowledging that it has been altered. He is well aware of my critique but prefers neither to mention it to his readers nor to engage with it.

Even the 1934 Arthur Grant sighting, discredited in a number of quarters as a hoax, I treated as genuine. Rupert Gould acknowledged that where this episode was concerned, 'A rumour reached me, from more than one quarter, that the story was a mere hoax.' Although Gould never met Grant and only ever communicated with him by letter he decided that the rumour was 'utterly groundless'. The idea that the sighting was a prank resurfaced in the twenty-first century, promulgated by 'prominent Nessie sceptic Tony Harmsworth' and 'arch sceptic, Dick Raynor'.

As with the Spicers, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* accepted that this sighting occurred and argued that it was a case of misperception:

> Arthur Grant's description of the creature which bounded across the road in the middle of the night is consistent with the appearance of an otter, but for the exaggeration of size. His sketch of the beast, reproduced in Oudemans's *The Loch Ness Animal*, bears a remarkable resemblance to an otter. Some versions of the episode also appear to refer to what sounds very much like an otter slide and tracks. The fact that Grant was a veterinary student does not necessarily signify that he knew anything about wild animals. A vet's income is derived mainly from ministering to domestic pets or farm animals. Even today zoo-vets are specialists, and in 1933 there were no zoos in the Highlands.

Needless to say, Roland Watson completely ignores this critique, just as he fails to mention Darren Naish's analysis:

> He described it as looking like a cross between a plesiosaur and a seal, with paddle-like limbs. Grant drew several versions of this creature, his earliest attempt being the least detailed. Perhaps he saw an otter and embellished his case over time. It's also possible that he encountered a seal. We know that seals occasionally occur in the loch, and a large one is not a bad match for the creature that Grant described.

If *When Monsters Come Ashore* had any claims to authority, scholarship or totality it would acknowledge and address such interpretations rather than shun all mention of them.

Watson's engagement with the classic land sightings is patchy. In the case of the Spicers' encounter with the monster he is plainly unaware of George Spicer's retort to local sceptics who argued that all he and his wife had seen was an otter. Spicer's defence of his monster supplied yet another imaginative version of the encounter:

> I cannot agree that it might have been an otter, as I have never seen or heard of one six to eight feet long. Whatever it was it is more likely that it was carrying an otter, as it went across the road in a series of jerks, as if it was tugging something, and quite different from the movement of a large snake.

This offers a startlingly new account which invites fresh interpretation. Spicer at this point sticks to his original estimate of size. This can only be regarded as highly subjective, since he was describing an animal or animals in motion momentarily glimpsed from a moving vehicle. The experience lasted only 'a few seconds'.

Whether accurate or not the dimensions are relatively small and not monstrous. It was only later that he transformed the dimensions of his monster to something very much bigger, justifying this with reference to the width of the road. He told Rupert Gould that it was 'at least 25 feet in length', and *The Times* that it was 'about 30 feet' long. Spicer was a man who was constantly reinterpreting his experience. Having initially described how the monster appeared to be carrying 'a small lamb or

animal of some kind' he now suggested it might have been an otter. His use of the term 'carrying' was ambiguous. It was, reasonably enough, interpreted as meaning that the lamb or small animal was being carried in the creature's *mouth*. Later Spicer seemed to indicate that it was carried on the creature's *back*. By the time he spoke to Rupert Gould the lamb/small animal/otter had evidently become possibly 'the end of a long tail'. However Mrs Spicer believed it may have been the head and neck of a young deer.

What is new amongst all these ambiguities and obscurities is the suggestion that the mystery animal 'went across the road in a series of jerks, as if it was tugging something'. This detail is absent from Spicer's first account, published seven days earlier. It raises the possibility that what he witnessed was an animal dragging its prey across the road. But trying to make sense of these contradictory impressions is difficult. What is telling is that Rupert Gould, a sympathetic interrogator, later concluded that the Spicers had simply seen deer on the road, which fled as their car approached.

Spicer's explanation for his greatly increased estimate of the monster's size was based partly on the road width and partly on the process of 'giving the matter mature thought in every way'. But remembering is not an innocent process:

> We grow ever more confident in our memories as they develop blurred edges. We are blissfully impervious to their haziness.
>
> ...when you remember that moment, you are not really remembering *that* moment. Instead you're remembering the last time you remembered it – retrieving what you recalled before and infusing that memory with the experiences and perceptions you've gathered since then. With remembering, there is rebuilding. And that is the thing about memory: it's a home constantly under reconstruction, not a video playing on a loop.

The widely differing reports of the land monster's size, shape and colour are excused by Watson on the grounds of variations in gender, age and behaviour. This simply reiterates Constance Whyte's bland defence of 'Certain discrepancies' in the accumulated eye-witness sightings made sixty-one years earlier. To a sceptic the inconsistencies indicate that the witnesses were simply observing different phenomena. Aleksandar

Lovĉanski has also argued that the Spicers saw an otter. Steuart Campbell suggests an otter as an explanation for the Jean MacDonald/Patricia Harvey sighting. Adrian Shine has argued that Margaret Munro saw a seal. Dick Raynor has suggested that the Torquil MacLeod sighting is consistent with the misperception of a group of goats.

Watson indignantly rejects these explanations. The central flaw in his reasoning is that he accepts the literal truth of every sighting and regards eye-witnesses as being as neutral as cameras. As far as Watson is concerned the language of every reported land sighting provides a snapshot of an event which is as accurate as a photograph. He measures the 'facts' of each eye-witness sighting against all sceptical interpretation and finds scepticism wanting. By contrast, the sceptic emphasizes the subjectivity of human perception and suggests that the eye-witness saw a real animal which the observer converted into a 'Monster'. Individuals who are taken by surprise by an animal which they may have never seen before, which they see only momentarily, often in conditions of poor visibility, perceive it as a 'Monster' and relate it to a well-known stereotypical beast of the loch. Memory and the passage of time solidify the event into a supernormal one.

Some of the supposed 'evidence' is risibly anecdotal, such as Alastair Mackintosh's account of meeting Alec Muir in his 'T' Ford on 'the narrow road just beyond Dores' soon after he had met the Monster moving across it. 'It came as high as the top of the bonnet of the car and was so long it took ten minutes to pass.'

But Mackintosh supplies no details at all about the Monster, despite the witness's sensationally close and lengthy encounter. All he mentions are seeing bubbles on the loch surface and 'the track of the monster' through a birch wood carpeted with moss and primroses. 'We had gone hardly a hundred yards when we came upon a clearing in the trees. Showing in the moss was an immense depression, where the monster had obviously lain down to rest.' Since Muir, described as the estate carpenter at the British Aluminium works in Foyers, called the animal 'the Loch Ness monster' and since the model T went out of production in 1927, this un-dated episode can be presumed to have happened in the years 1933-39.

This remarkable experience went unrecorded at the time. There were no photographs of the Monster's tracks and no report to the always interested and ever sympathetic *Inverness Courier*. F. W. Holiday was

the first person to spot this anecdote and absorb it into Nessie lore, citing it as evidence of amphibious tendencies. Watson (who manages to misquote Mackintosh's account both on his blog and in his book) also finds this account 'interesting'. Alluding to Mackintosh's mention of bubbles he asks: 'Does this imply the monster is an air breather or that it discharges air for some reason after a land excursion (e.g. decreasing buoyancy)?'

A better question would be why this amazing experience surfaced only in Mackintosh's memoir years afterwards. As always, context is everything. According to Mackintosh, who was born in 1889, he produced his memoir over a two-year period between 1956-8. The book was published in 1961, when he was in his early seventies. The composition of the book coincided with the appearance in 1957 of Constance Whyte's *More Than a Legend*. Mackintosh describes a trip to Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness the morning after the Inverness earthquake of 1901: 'To my amazement the loch seemed to be boiling. For over a quarter of a mile there were enormous bubbles, each the height of a man.' This description bears a curious resemblance to the one given in *More Than a Legend* by an eye-witness who in 1933 reported seeing the loch surface 'in a state of turmoil over an area extending to several hundred square yards' some two miles south-west of the castle. That report immediately follows Constance Whyte's account of six land sightings of the Monster. Pure coincidence, or did Mackintosh simply imaginatively absorb Whyte's colourful monster tales?

Alastair Mackintosh was born into a wealthy family which owned Inshes House, a large country house on an estate south east of Inverness. His memoir is a languid, name-dropping account of the life of a rich, well-connected dilettante. He certainly knew Loch Ness but there is no suggestion that he had every heard of a monster there before the year 1933. In 1908 he was apprenticed to the British Aluminium Company at Foyers, under a foreman named Gray (perhaps the father or uncle of Hugh Gray, who 25 years later took the first Monster photograph).

Mackintosh by his own admission was a heavy drinker by the time he was a teenager, as were his fellow workers at Foyers. That his memory is faulty is indicated by his reference to the distance between Foyers and Inverness being twenty-three miles; Mackintosh is plainly getting confused with the length of Loch Ness. His memoir as a whole is suffused by vagueness, especially regarding dates. What is odd about his

description of the Alec Muir episode is the complete lack of interest in Nessie's appearance. If what Alec Muir experienced really happened this witness enjoyed the most spectacular close-up encounter with the Monster of anyone who ever lived. Both the proximity and the length of time involved should have supplied him with extraordinary knowledge of the creature's appearance, size and means of locomotion. Moreover, Mackintosh describes tangible evidence which confirmed Muir's story: tracks, a giant depression and bubbles on the loch surface. It is therefore as extraordinary as the anecdote itself that Mackintosh should then remark of 'this monster' the damning qualification 'always supposing it to exist'.

Ultimately this strange tale sounds like a tall one, matching others in the memoir. Anecdotes in *No Alibi* include a fortune-teller who accurately predicts the imminent violent death of one of Mackintosh's friends, Lady Chetwode's encounter with a ghost shepherd and his flock of ghost sheep, and the author's own encounter with a sinister and spectral 'little man' on the family estate, as well a strange presence in the attic above his bedroom which made a noise 'as if casks were being rolled across the floor'.

Perhaps Mackintosh resembled his associate Lord Lonsdale whose 'sense of showmanship' required a colourfully exaggerated account of every commonplace event: 'He *had* to tell a story, however much at variance with the facts.'

When Monsters Come Ashore presents two new land sightings. The first occurred at 3pm on 27 November 1975 on a ridge of gravel close to where the River Morar flows out of the western end of Loch Morar. Donald Simpson was driving along the narrow road at this spot when he saw 'a powerful, 20 foot long animal which rose out of the water less than 40 feet from the car. It lurched across the gravel bar and sank into the deeper waters of the loch.' He later described his sighting to a painter friend who did a watercolour of the creature, showing a huge body, a powerful leg and what might have been a tail or a long, slender neck. Donald Simpson was 'a highly respected man, an elder of the church and an authority on the wildlife of the area'.

Proof of Morag the Monster? Not really. The witness is long dead and Watson's sole source for this story is Tony Healy, author of *The Yowie: In Search of Australia's Bigfoot* and co-author of *Australian Poltergeist*.

A central contradiction of this sighting is that although Simpson was 'much too close to the massive creature to have been mistaken' his brother Charles was sitting next to him in the front passenger seat and saw nothing at all. The sighting 'lasted only a couple of seconds'. It was 'so unexpected, so startling and so brief'. Charles was alerted to his brother's sighting by hearing him 'suddenly gasp and choke as if unable to breathe'.

Donald Simpson's first words to his brother were 'This will startle the world.' It seems a curiously revealing remark when put back into the context of the time. Three years earlier Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell and David Solomon's book *The Search for Morag* was published, asserting that the loch definitely contained a monster with the same features as the better-known one in Loch Ness. Simpson's sighting of 27 November 1975 came at the very moment that the Loch Ness Monster was back in the headlines following the leaking of the news that sensational underwater photographs had been obtained. One of the salient features of the Loch Ness story is that publicity generates sightings and that when the publicity ends, so too do the sightings. Watson himself acknowledges that where land sightings are concerned 'it is a bit unusual that nothing was reported in the years between 1936 and 1960'.

Once again we are faced with the phenomenon of the eye-witness in a moving vehicle who has a momentary glimpse of something they process as a large unknown animal (Mrs Mackay, the Spicers, Tim Dinsdale). Verification from a third party is always absent. The state of mind of the witness at the moment of their experience can never be known. And once again we are faced with the remarkable historical reality that in the years that follow no one else has this experience. Donald Simpson's sighting remains a unique one and it is more plausible that its explanation lies with the observer rather than what is supposed to have been observed. It is also another kind of evidence which modern technology is likely to terminate. The invention of the dashcam makes it unlikely that any future land sightings will occur from moving vehicles – unless the vehicle lacks a dashcam or the reported object is conveniently out of range.

If monsters really did exist and come ashore you would expect this to happen at Loch Morar far more than at Loch Ness. Loch Morar is remote, tranquil and undisturbed. There is very little boat traffic. It has numerous little bays along its northern shore, where wave action has ground the

pebbles small – perfect for a smooth-bellied amphibian. Its southern shore is inaccessible and unvisited. But though popular with the hardier kind of hiker, the loch has no credible sightings record at all, whether on land or at the surface, and there is not even one classic Morag photograph.

Roland Watson records the most recent land sighting at Loch Ness as having occurred around 11pm on 2 February 2009 when Ian Monckton and Tracey Gordon pulled into a lay-by near Invermoriston and heard a terrific splash. Going to investigate, Monckton took flash photographs to see where the edge of the steep slope was. Later, when he examined the pictures he found that one of them contained an image of what Monckton decided was 'clearly a very large shape in the water that looks aquatic a few yards out from where I was standing and you just see the tips of the trees lower down the slope'. Unfortunately the image reproduced by Watson, which is presumably cropped, simply shows a pale, blurred, indeterminate shape of unknown dimensions against a black background. There are no tips of trees visible. Watson states that he asked Ian Monckton if he could see the original image 'but, alas, he told me he had lost it when his laptop had a hard disk failure!' Every aspect of this episode is inconclusive but it provides a good example of how almost any unusual experience at Loch Ness can be processed as evidence of the Monster.

Watson never addresses the limitations and subjectivities of eye-witness evidence and memory, even though these are well studied subjects. He has a naïve faith in the supposed objectivity of human perception and recall, despite a wealth of literature which exposes its limitations. For quality he substitutes quantity, insisting that the volume of sightings is self-validating. Faith and doctrine are sufficient to bolster belief, as seems apt for a Monster which has been traced back to Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* – a text of wonders and marvels, the authenticity of which are insisted upon by Adomnán, who cites numerous eye-witnesses and asserts their absolute credibility.

16. and 17. The approximate site of the Spicers' land sighting, with rough ground below the road and the rocky beach. The side of a passing car is partly visible just to the right of the tree in the centre (above).

18. ‘The Horseshoe’ on the south side of Loch Ness, where Torquil Macleod claimed to have seen the Monster from about this location.

19. Loch Morar has many quiet, secluded beaches like this one but there are no classic land sightings.

Part Two:
After the Thrill is Gone

20. A monstrous ‘head and neck’ tree trunk on a Loch Ness estate.

11

The Silence

'Well, have you solved it?' I asked as I entered.

'Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta.'

'No, no, the mystery!' I cried.

'Oh, that! ...There was never any mystery in the matter, though as I said yesterday, some of the details are of interest.'

Arthur Conan Doyle, 'A Case of Identity' (1891)

A lot happened in the immediate aftermath of publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* in May 1983 but much of it went unreported at the time.

Three months later Henry Bauer arrived at Loch Ness and by May 1984 he had completed a draft of *The Enigma of Loch Ness: Making Sense of a Mystery*, which would attempt to retrieve the credibility of the monster and its two foremost living proponents, Robert Rines and Tim Dinsdale.

And as one new monster author arrived, another old one left.

Did Frank Searle ever read *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*? It's hard to believe he didn't learn of its publication. Even if he didn't see the prominent feature in the *Daily Express*, which made it 'Book of the Week', a passing tourist could easily have mentioned reading or hearing about the book. It was widely reviewed in national publications and local newspapers, and although the *Inverness Courier* sullenly declined to acknowledge its existence, copies of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* were piled high in the window of Inverness's main bookshop.

If Searle did read it he would probably have enjoyed its assault on Tim

Dinsdale's film, since Dinsdale was one of the many figures at the loch he hated. But he can scarcely have been overjoyed by the book's perfunctory treatment of his own role as a full-time monster hunter, or by its dismissive identification of him as a fraudster. Was my book a factor in his departure from the lochside? In less than a year from its publication Searle had gone, abandoning his caravan and his exhibition hut and vanishing into complete obscurity. He knew the game was up.

If it *was* a factor in his flight it raises the question of Searle's own attitude to the monster. Did he first arrive at the loch as a genuine believer, or was he just a chancer who discovered he could enjoy a pleasant life there, enjoying the attentions of passing Girl Fridays and admiration and respect from tourists? Back in 1972 he was already telling visitors that he was 'getting a bit weary of the solitary life' and contemplating only 'another two years' of surveillance. He dreamed of 'a companion' and a caravan.

Loch Ness affords everyone the chance to become a minor celebrity, irrespective of their CV. Was Searle a passionate believer who lost patience with long fruitless hours of surveillance and who then decided to take the easy route to fame and fortune? No one in the Loch Ness story has been so explicitly obsessed with making lots of lovely lolly as Searle. But in his heart of hearts did he finally lose any belief in Nessie which he once possessed? He found his caravan, various female companions, and by 1976 was the published author of a monster book.

But his writing career did not flourish, even though he believed that 'There must be at least 50,000 people waiting to buy a book with my name on it.' He came up with material which he variously titled *Monster Hunter Extraordinary*, *Camp on Loch Ness* and *Eleven Years in Search of the Monster*, but struggled to find a publisher. One publisher's reader acidly reported that Searle's work amounted to 'home-spun news letter reporting' and was too insubstantial to withstand 'the ridicule that would dog its publication'. He continued to revise and expand his manuscript but by 10 February 1983 was sourly telling one admirer, 'I'm beginning to think it's easier to take a trip to the moon than to get a book published.' Almost a year later, on 20 January 1984, he wrote, 'I shall probably be moving off from here in March.' He claimed that motorboats were contaminating the loch and impeding his work. There were hints of future involvement in the quest for treasure in a sunken Spanish galleon, although 'he did not say where that was'. Searle's last address was

Woodside, Farr-Strathnairn, Inverness. And then he moved away, ceasing all communication and vanishing into the obscurity of his later years.

His departure within a year of the publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* may of course have been simply a coincidence. Perhaps Searle never saw a copy of my book. Or perhaps, as rumour hints, the bully had himself been receiving menacing threats. It would hardly have been surprising if someone hadn't decided to give Searle a taste of his own medicine. By 1983 his aggression towards other monster hunters was taking ugly new forms. It was undoubtedly Searle who vandalised the walls of Urquhart Castle with abusive slogans about Adrian Shine. And there really can be no doubt at all that it was also Searle who launched the clumsy and potentially lethal attack with a Molotov cocktail on the Ness and Morar Project's catamaran. Attempts to exonerate Searle over this ugly episode are not remotely convincing. He was capable of charming men and women when he chose to do so, but that he was a bully with a short fuse and man who sometimes resorted to violence, is a matter of record. And by 1983 he was evidently living alone, having alienated the last of his Girl Fridays.

One of the peculiarities of the Loch Ness story since my book was published is the way in which Searle been transformed into a leading player in the saga. Henry Bauer solemnly informed his readers that Tim Dinsdale had 'received the uncommon distinction of a respectful obituary in the London *Times*'. In fact, Dinsdale's *Times* obituary was a short one, unlike Frank Searle's, which occupied an entire page. This account of Searle's life combined standard inaccuracies about the monster (St Columba did not see it 'in the loch') with comprehensive vagueness about Searle's activities before he arrived at Loch Ness in 1969. The *Times* obituary concluded with the claim that 'nobody did more than Searle to draw the visitors there'. But if any single person put Loch Ness on the map during those years it was surely Tim Dinsdale. Searle was always a marginal figure, away from the main tourist route, tucked away on the south shore. He was only ever a very minor, uninteresting individual, who contributed nothing whatever to Loch Ness monster theory or practice. His legacy is a cache of fakes which are so laughably bad they make the likes of Christian Spurling, Lachlan Stuart and Peter O'Connor appear to possess the genius of Leonardo da Vinci.

Whatever was happening on the south shore, my book's impact was

felt in Drumnadrochit. Anthony Harmsworth, the designer and curator of the monster exhibition at the Drumnadrochit Hotel, had briefly featured in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* as the author of the exhibition *Guide*, as well as the author of a glossy tourist booklet, *The Mysterious Monsters of Loch Ness*. Harmsworth was at that time a fervent believer in the monster and my two brief allusions to his writing formed part of my wide-ranging critique of the case for monsters. He later jeered that my book was 'rather prematurely titled'. But, by an amazing coincidence, the year after *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was published Harmsworth's pro-monster exhibition did a U-turn. In 1984 it allowed scepticism to enter the presentation and in 2010 Harmsworth published a memoir. In it he firmly identified himself as a sceptic and asserted that the possibility of monsters in Loch Ness was 'infinitesimally remote'. Ironically Harmsworth would later grumble that, having replaced him with another curator, The Loch Ness Centre had a website which 'has a history section which writes me out of the history of the centre completely'.

Of much greater significance than the somersault silently performed at what was then called 'The Loch Ness Monster Exhibition' was the impact *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* had on Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar. By sheer coincidence these two investigators arrived at Loch Ness in May 1983, the month of my book's publication. Razdan and Kielar had what they described as a 'longstanding interest in the Loch Ness legend' and, as sonar experts, they were interested in the underwater evidence for monsters published by Robert Rines, Harold Edgerton, Charles Wyckoff, Marty Klein, Adrian Shine and others. The sonar evidence and the underwater photographs of the Academy of Applied Science had, in their words, given the Monster 'sufficient scientific credibility that a zoological classification has been ascribed to the creature'. The 1975 *Nature* feature on the Monster might have been regarded with disdain and scepticism by influential British zoologists, but in the United States it still carried weight.

The two Americans designed a sophisticated 15-ton sonar rig consisting of 144 sonar transducers arranged in a 12 x 12 grid.

> Any sonar target over 3 metres in length moving under the grid triggered an alarm, and the target was automatically tracked in three dimensions. Schools of fish were automatically recognized and

> ignored by the tracking electronics based on an analysis of the evidence from each sonar transducer. Nine underwater dart guns with retrievable biopsy darts were mounted on the array and could be automatically fired upon detection of an intruder beneath.

This formidable rig was tested at Conesus Lake in New York State and then shipped to Loch Ness. It was moored in that part of Urquhart Bay where the Academy of Applied Science had previously enjoyed such spectacular success. The equipment developed by Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar was altogether more sophisticated than anything used before. It promised a definitive solution rather than the kind of inconclusive results supplied by previous sub-surface investigation involving Robert Rines's Academy of Applied Science and Adrian Shine's Loch Ness and Morar Project:

> This expedition had the advantage of being able to image in three dimensions and obtain an actual tissue sample from any large underwater creature coming within range of our 25-metre x 25-metre array. The karyotype analysis of a tissue sample would provide conclusive evidence of the existence of some unique creatue, in contrast to ambiguous sonar traces and photographs presented by previous researchers.

Having arrived at Loch Ness the two American investigators discovered a new book on Nessie had just appeared. To their dismay *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* presented a blistering critique of the orthodox Loch Ness narrative, arguing that the Monster was simply a modern myth kept alive by the media, the special pleading of unreliable monster books, and eye-witnesses who had misperceived a wide range of natural and known phenomena.

The book's pugnacious insistence that there were no large unknown animals in Loch Ness was now about to be tested. After all, it required only a single monster to cross Razdan and Kielar's grid to demonstrate that Ronald Binns was wrong and that there really *was* something down there. What's more a supplementary biopsy sample would establish the Monster's reality beyond dispute.

The Americans discovered that perhaps Binns was right after all. The result of all their effort was bitter disappointment:

> By July 25, 1983, the array was fully functional and ran continuously until September 16, 1983. During that time it recorded nothing larger than a 1-metre fish. We are aware that our stationary array could monitor only a very small area of the Loch, but this area was one that had produced the most compelling evidence to date.

While they were at Loch Ness from May to October 1983, Razdan and Kielar carried out a different type of local research. Their reading of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* and the paucity of their own results induced a newly sceptical attitude to what had previously been regarded as rock-solid sonar evidence and intriguing underwater photographs.

Speaking to local people and former Loch Ness Investigation personnel, they discovered that the circumstances in which the 1972 'flipper' photographs had been obtained were very different to the version peddled by Robert Rines. The Academy's transducer unit was not secured to the bed of the loch but was actually free-swinging. The sonar traces attributed to the presence of two monsters were almost certainly wakes from the boat being used by team members that night. Later investigation in the USA revealed three versions of the 'flipper' pictures: the originals, the computer enhanced images, and finally the published versions, which were different and indicated that the pictures had been 'significantly altered' to create an impression of flipper-like objects.

Razdan and Kielar made another important discovery of great significance for an understanding of previous 'Monster' sonar results:

> Our conversations during the summer of 1983 with Ivor Newby, a participant in many expeditions at Loch Ness during the sixties, revealed that monster hunters have either lost or failed to retrieve numerous bits and pieces of their underwater gear over the years. He told us that several plexiglass-enclosed cameras are still presumed floating in the midwater, moored to the lochbed, as are at least two steel gas-cylinders used for sonar calibration tests in the 1960s. This type of debris would give strong sonar returns.

Returning to the USA in October 1983, Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar proceeded to assess critically the underwater evidence from Loch Ness. The following year they went public, arguing that the flipper photographs had been doctored. Their research confirmed the suspicions embodied in

my own cautious reference to 'doubts about the way in which the image was being interfered with'. As I pointed out, a hoax involving someone within the investigation was 'by no means impossible'. I had laconically noted that the timing of the 1972 pictures, when morale at the Loch Ness Investigation was low, was 'fortuitous'. Razdan and Kielar triumphantly confirmed all the dark suspicions about the flipper photographs which were articulated over four pages of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. The problem, they established, lay not in the computer enhancement of the images but in the doctoring of the enhanced versions. They also revealed that the circumstances under which the images had been obtained were different to those described by the Academy. What had been photographed was not part of a gigantic living animal but merely the bed of the loch. What appeared to be part of the bone structure of a flipper was actually a furrow on the loch bed, gouged out by Rines's own equipment.

My book criticised the sonar evidence from Loch Ness, citing a variety of authorities to show that there were 'ambiguities and problems involved in using sonar to solve the mystery'. What was even worse was 'the partisan interpretation of complex technical data by operators with a passionate commitment to the beast's existence'. Razdan and Kielar expanded these points, bringing to bear their considerable technical expertise. The result of their critical scrutiny of the evidence was the essay 'Sonar and Photographic Searches for the Loch Ness Monster: A Reassessment', first published in the Winter 1984-85 issue of the American magazine *The Skeptical Inquirer* and subsequently republished in a 1986 volume of essays, *Science Confronts the Paranormal*, edited by Kendrick Frazier.

Razdan and Kielar's essay tore the Academy's research results apart, debunking both the 1972 and 1975 underwater photographs. They also criticised the sonar work of previous investigators, dismissing the results obtained by Braithwaite and Tucker, Robert Love, the *Pisces* submarine and Adrian Shine and his 'Loch Ness and Morar Project'.

When Razdan and Kielar's essay was republished in *Science Confronts the Paranormal* it was followed by a list of 'Recommended Reading'. There was only one monster book included. It is not necessary to spell out which author was the one who merited inclusion.

Throughout 1983 and 1984 *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was greeted with silence by what might loosely be called the Loch Ness establishment. No one came forward to challenge its analysis and conclusions. Whatever Tim Dinsdale may have felt about it in private, publicly he had nothing to say. This reluctance to acknowledge or engage with its content was perpetuated by Nicholas Witchell, who as late as 1989 declined to recognise its existence. As far as Witchell was concerned 'the Loch Ness story' remained intact. Its rotten foundations, he blandly continued to insist, were rock solid.

Strangely, the *Inverness Courier* shunned all mention of the book, even though it was widely reviewed in the Scottish press and I appeared on both radio and TV in Scotland promoting it. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* pointed an accusing finger at the seminal role played by the *Courier's* Fort Augustus stringer, Alex Campbell, in promoting the notion of a monster in Loch Ness. The book also unearthed from the *Courier*'s own back numbers a satirical interview with the Monster which mocked Campbell – a piece evidently written by a cynical local journalist with personal knowledge of the man.

Alexander Macmillan Campbell died within weeks of my book's publication, aged 82. He had apparently been ill for some eighteen months. I think it is highly unlikely that he ever saw a copy of my book. This has not deterred Roland Watson from charmlessly and incoherently suggesting that publication of the book was held over until Campbell died (it wasn't) or that the dying man learned of my critique of his historic role in the Monster story but 'was probably too weak to answer the charges'. An obituary of Campbell appeared in the *Inverness Courier* on 1 July 1983. It's a curiously anodyne and uninformative account of a man who to this day remains very much a mystery.

This obituary has a slightly defensive quality, insisting that 'his meticulous attention to detail and his very clear hand writing made the accuracy of his reports beyond question'. It's a point easily disproved by reference to Campbell's famous 2 May 1933 report on the Monster, which managed to get numerous things wrong. Campbell refers to a sighting on Friday 28 May, but Mrs Mackay told Rupert Gould it occurred on 14 April. Campbell wrote of 'a tremendous upheaval on the loch' which 'occurred fully three-quarters of a mile from the shore'. Mrs Mackay said the commotion in the water was just 100 yards from the shore and appeared at first to be caused 'by two ducks fighting'. Campbell wrote that 'both

onlookers confessed that there was something uncanny about the whole thing' and that 'the beast' was of 'enormous size'. Rupert Gould discovered that Mr Mackay, who was driving the car, had seen no animal at all. By the time he had stopped the car all he witnessed was 'the final commotion' and waves rolling on to the shore.

Far from being a dispassionate reporter, Campbell was a man with a burning agenda. He grandly stated that 'Loch Ness has for generations been credited with being the home of a fearsome-looking monster', which was complete fantasy on his part. He also tried to pre-empt sceptical responses to his news item by insisting that 'so far as is known, neither seals or porpoises have ever been known to enter Loch Ness. Indeed, in the case of the latter, it would be utterly impossible for them to do so…' In fact, porpoises were reported in Loch Ness in 1914, when lochside resident Campbell was thirteen years old. It is now commonly accepted that seals intermittently visit Loch Ness.

Ironically, the very next month the Monster was seen by Fort Augustus resident John Cameron of Fountain Cottage. He said 'the creature seemed rather like a porpoise or a seal. It cruised about on the surface for several minutes, and then disappeared almost in the centre of the loch, at a point about one mile from the entrance to the Caledonian Canal.' The sighting lasted some fifteen minutes.

A week later another sighting was reported, indicating that scepticism was still a common local response to Campbell's wild claims:

> Several Fort Augustus people, it was reported yesterday, have seen the animal, and in the opinion of Mr F. Sutherland, Lovat Terrace, who had a good view of the creature, it is nothing more startling than a sturgeon.
>
> If such is the case, the explanation of the presence in the loch of this fish, which is an irregular visitor to the estuaries of British rivers, is doubtless that it travelled up the River Ness during a spate and then entered Loch Ness.
>
> The sturgeon attains a length of from 8 to 12 feet, and the largest specimens are said to weigh several hundredweights.

The Monster failed to gain traction in those early weeks and there was

evidence of widespread scepticism among local people. That historic scepticism was airbrushed from the record in later years and it was one of the pioneering approaches of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* that it returned to scrutinise the long-ignored origins of the Monster myth.

The only public notice that the book received from within the fraternity of believers came at the margins. When the Loch Ness Investigation collapsed, former LNI volunteer and part-time employee Rip Hepple set up the 'Ness Information Service' which supplied news about the Monster for subscribers through the medium of *Nessletter*, a typed small-format newsletter which appeared at irregular intervals, five or six times a year. As mentioned in the Introduction, Issue 58 (June 1983) published its editor's account of a commentary on *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* received from a new Nessie hunter, Roland Watson.

Watson sidestepped the book's revelations about the 1933 files of the *Inverness Courier*, its critique of Alex Campbell and its demolition of the Monster 'tradition' to quarrel instead with its treatment of the later evidence. Watson was indignant about my book's assault on the Rines flipper photograph, asserting that 'there is absolutely no evidence of a hoax'. He grumbled that 'he [Binns] says that Lachlan Stuart's photograph was of rocks', which was a misunderstanding of the book's observation that the photographed objects 'are extremely close to the shore and in shallow water' and that rocks can be found much further out from the shore at this location than Constance Whyte ever believed was possible. The three objects in the Stuart photograph cannot possibly be rocks, since they would have been immediately obvious to observers who visited the site just after the photograph was taken (assuming that Stuart was truthful about the date and time). My point was simply that the presence of rocks in the loch below Whitefield indicated just how shallow the water was at the place where Stuart photographed his 'Monster'. Of course, he may well have used one or more of these rocks to anchor his 'Monster' or to utilise one or more of them as a foundation for the artefacts he photographed. These are now widely believed to be bales of hay covered in tarpaulin – a theory based on Stuart's supposed confession to Richard Frere.

Watson complained that the book's 'dismissal of Adrian Shine's results in February's *New Scientist* is unfair', even though the criticism of them as 'quite inconclusive' was a matter of fact rather than opinion,

as presumably even Shine would now acknowledge. Less than two years later Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar argued that Shine had failed to show that his contacts moved either horizontally or vertically and that they were probably stationary mid-water debris.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved gathered momentum, with new editions which spread its message to a wider audience. In the U.K., Encounters Book Club distributed it as a recommended title to its subscribers. The American rights were sold to Prometheus Books, which published both hardback and paperback editions in 1984. The book made news in *The Wall Street Journal* and was widely reviewed, reaching even niche publications such as *Tropical Fish Hobbyist*, whose reviewer called it 'the most refreshing "monster" book I've read in years'. Others called it 'thorough' and 'convincing'; 'the author has certainly done his homework'.

I was in France in the summer of 1983 when I learned from a news report in *The Times* that the paperback rights of my book had been sold in the U.K. It transpired that Frank Searle had approached the publishers W.H. Allen with the manuscript of his second book about the monster. Its contents presumably overlapped with the undated manuscript *Loch Ness Investigation* which has become publicly available since Searle's death in 2005. This second book, lavishly illustrated with fake photographs, would presumably have combined an account of Searle's own activities at the loch with his grotesque slanders against other monster hunters. He seems to have had a particular animus against Tim Dinsdale, David James and Adrian Shine. By now Searle had become a paranoid conspiracy-monger:

> There's no doubt at all in my mind that the arrival of Tim Dinsdale at Foyers in April 1960 was carefully planned. I think that he had already met David James, and the "making" of the film, the showing on Panorama, the writing of the first book and the setting up of the Bureau was all part of the plan.

Amusingly, Searle felt that in order to establish the existence of the Loch Ness Monster all that was required was half a million pounds to fund serious research. And who better to administer this mouth-watering sum than Frank Searle?

> If the money was ever made available it would have to be used properly and not be allowed to fall into the hands of people like some of those mentioned in this booklet…If the money was ever made available to me… [I would] work out what would be the most practical way of identifying these animals in Loch Ness. When the method had been established, I would go to the company best suited to carry out the project, lay the cash on the table, and tell them to start work.

Adrian Shine, alert to the defamatory content of Searle's rambling manuscript, intervened to get the book blocked. He suggested that if the publishers wanted to put out a Loch Ness Monster paperback, my book would be a better bet than what Searle was offering. I was unaware of any of this until it was a done deal, but unsurprisingly Frank Searle was quick to detect a conspiracy against himself. He alleged that Mike Bailey, Star's editorial director, 'handled' Tim Dinsdale's books. Whether Searle meant as an agent or an editor is unclear, but it was patently untrue, since Dinsdale was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, a publishing house which had no connection at all with W.H. Allen, whose paperback division was the Star imprint. As it turned out, Mike Bailey invited me to have lunch with him to talk about Star doing my book. Had he really worked on other monster books I am sure this would have come up in conversation. But the name Tim Dinsdale was never mentioned.

Searle failed to grasp that those who worked in major publishing houses were quite indifferent as to whether or not a monster book was true, or what angle it took. All they wanted to know was *would it sell?* The threat of a libel action was quite enough to scare off any publisher. Besides, Searle was an execrable writer, who could never hope to match the journalistic fluency of Nicholas Witchell, the atmospheric scene-setting and colourful theories of Ted Holiday, or the passionate personal quest so vividly described by Tim Dinsdale.

The Star paperback edition of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* duly appeared in the summer of 1984, attracting more reviews and giving me the brief thrill of seeing copies on prominent display in the windows of bookshops on London's Charing Cross Road. The unattributed cover used a gorgeous photograph of Urquhart Bay on a flat calm day, with a wisp of low cloud and Loch Ness looking as blue as the Mediterranean. The design was elegant, but in reality W.H. Allen's paperback imprint, Star books, was at the unprestigious, trashy end of paperback publishing

– something underlined by the Star books catalogue, which put it alongside *Nymph in Paris*, a sex book showing a scantily clad young woman on the cover. Whereas Ronald Binns offered 'A convincing solution to one of the greatest mysteries in natural history', the companion volume promised the thrill of 'A young girl's fantastic journey towards sexual emancipation'.

Happily this did not prevent my book from receiving a rave review in the political journal *New Statesman*:

> Binns sets out, like a modern Sherlock Holmes, to scrutinise the evidence. Unlike the Nessy-worshippers, he always goes back to first sources, sets every quote in context, monitors the changing testimony over the years, isolates the self-interest involved, canvasses the alternative explanations, ending up with an elegant literary diagram, analysing the history of an illusion, which is both exciting and convincing. Voltaire could not have done better.

12

The Shining

'You work your own method, and I shall work mine. I shall be busy this afternoon, and I shall probably return to London by the evening train.'

'And leave your case unfinished?'

'No, finished.'

'But the mystery?'

'It is solved.'

Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery' (1891)

In his survey of the Loch Ness story Gareth Williams writes, '[Adrian] Shine always knew that he would not make friends by trying to demystify the Loch.' I'm probably Williams's only reader to find these words deeply ironic. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* debunked the entire Loch Ness Monster saga, and back in the 1980s the list of those dismayed by the book's unequivocal conclusions included Shine himself. If there was no monster, where did that leave his Loch Ness Project? What was the point in further exploration by an amateur like himself of a loch devoid of large unknown animals?

Nowadays Adrian Shine represents himself as a sceptical investigator who mistrusted eye-witness evidence from the very beginning of his involvement with lake monsters in 1973. But this is a distinctly revisionist account of his career as a Loch Ness Monster hunter.

In February 1983, shortly before my book *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was published, Adrian Shine published an article entitled 'The biology of Loch Ness'. Its mouth-watering sub-heading was: 'Loch Ness

and its creatures are at last being subjected to thorough biological investigation. Results from the Loch Ness and Morar Project suggest that the loch might indeed harbour a large predator.'

The article began by noting that it would shortly be fifty years 'since the world at large was first made aware of the monster of Loch Ness'. The article reveals that Shine, like every other monster hunter, had bought into the myth of the lonely loch promulgated by Constance Whyte some twenty-six years earlier in *More Than a Legend*. Far from demystifying the Loch and its monster, after ten years of investigation Shine was just as much in thrall to the orthodox narrative as anyone else there.

According to Shine, it was no surprise that the existence of the monster reached the wider world only in 1933: 'Before then (before, that is, the age of the motor roads and the tourists that went with them) it was known only to the Highlanders, and the hunting, shooting and fishing gentlemen who learned of her from their gillies.' Three months later my book was published, debunking every aspect of the Loch Ness Monster and the great monster hunt. Chapter Four of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, entitled 'Loch Ness Before The Monster', blew nonsense like Shine's 'lonely loch' claim out of the water. And once it had been established that Loch Ness was in reality overflowing with tourists and visitors in the second half of the nineteenth century, this raised the question why no one over all those decades had recorded ever seeing or reported hearing local stories of a strange beast in the loch.

Shine's 'The biology of Loch Ness' alluded to the classic photographs and included a curiously terse and frosty mention of one 'T.K. Dinsdale'. The article respectfully honoured 'Dr Roy Mackal' whom, *New Scientist* readers were informed, had introduced 'Higher standards' to the investigation. Mackal had 'revealed how photographs could be faked or mistakes made'. This is the same Roy Mackal who regarded Lachlan Stuart's photograph as being 'of considerable importance because each of the depicted humps is very similar to the single hump filmed by Tim Dinsdale' and who hailed the underwater 'flipper' picture as 'indeed probably the pectoral limb of one of the large unknown aquatic animals in the loch'. Shine was equally deferential to 'Dr R. H. Rines of the Academy of Applied Science, Concord, New Hampshire' and Sir Peter Scott, authors of a now infamous 1975 *Nature* article: 'they recognised the ambiguities and based their paper on wider evidence, and were prompted by concern for conservation'.

The basic message of Shine's article was that everyone before him had failed. But by bringing scientific rigour to the mystery and subjecting the loch 'to thorough and systematic study' he was finally delivering results. Firstly, Loch Ness, 'despite appearances', offered 'considerable resources of food' in the form of fish. Therefore 'There seems to be no overwhelming biological reasons why Loch Ness could not support a "monster".' Secondly, his Project's use of sonar was confirming the suspicion that there really *was* a monster. One target was tracked for 68 seconds, apparently diving from a depth of 69 metres to 114 metres: 'The strength, depth and probable movement of the target are extraordinary.' In short, 'if there are large creatures in Loch Ness, then they would appear on sonar just as we have recorded them'. This was 'data consistent with the presence of large animals'.

Exciting stuff. Shine was managing to find sexy evidence of monsters where all before him had failed. Peter Baker (who, unlike the unqualified Shine, was a scientist) was the first investigator to search for monsters in the depths of Loch Ness in an objective and methodical way. The results had been disappointing:

> If a large aquatic creature exists in Loch Ness it ought – at least in theory – to be possible to locate it by electronic underwater detection equipment. This was the main aim of the Cambridge expeditions to Loch Ness in 1960 and again in 1962; but on neither occasion was any evidence obtained for the presence of a large creature in the loch.

Baker's team used a variety of search methods, which included a beam projected out across the loch from sub-surface equipment and projecting a beam downward from a motor boat. The most comprehensive approach involved the creation of a 'sonic curtain' using a fleet of boats which were lined up and sent from one end of the loch to the other.

Nothing was detected that could not be accounted for by large salmon. The largest salmon ever caught in Britain, by Georgina Ballantine in 1922, weighed 64lbs, was 54 inches long (1.37m), with a girth of 28½ inches (0.71m).

The results of Peter Baker's team's sonar search were discouraging for some quite basic reasons:

> Perhaps there is a large unidentified object in the main body of the loch; however, if so, it does not give rise to an echo. This is extremely unlikely as all living organisms immersed in the fresh water of Loch Ness ought to act as reflectors, although their efficiency in this respect will be very variable. What can be said is that is that if there is a large unidentified animal present in the main body of the loch it must be a very poor reflector of ultra-sound which suggests it cannot contain structures such as bone, lungs or air-sacs – all of which ought to act as excellent reflectors.

But there was always wriggle room for believers. Perhaps the monster lived on the bed of the loch or in the mud there. Besides, sonar could never quite reach every aspect of this very substantial underwater world. There were also parts of the loch where a monster might slip away to evade detection, such as Stoney Pool at Invermoriston or the River Foyers where it drained into the loch. Since the monster was widely believed to be amphibious it might even, in theory, take refuge on land or already be there when the underwater searches took place. Much of the shoreline of Loch Ness is inaccessible except by boat. F. W. Holiday described how on the lonely shoreline beyond Inverfarigaig he encountered 'a curious patch of bent and broken bushes several yards wide beside the water for which it was hard to think of an obvious explanation'. Later he learned that local people sometimes find these patches, which, he claimed, they attribute to the Monster. And the classic land sightings indicated that the Monster occasionally slithered beyond the roads around the loch.

Back in those days there was always something fresh – a new sighting, a new photograph, a new report, a new investigation – to raise the spirits of the faithful. Peter Baker's dispiriting results were quietly sidelined and forgotten. The 1966 JARIC report seemed to confirm the belief that Tim Dinsdale really *had* filmed a gigantic unknown animal. In 1968 a team from the University of Birmingham led by Professor D. G. Tucker and Hugh Braithwaite arrived at Loch Ness to carry out trials of a new sort of sonar. Two mystery objects which seemed too large to be fish were recorded moving in unusual ways at remarkable speeds. These results were promptly published in *New Scientist*, with the claim that it was both a 'temptation' and a 'possibility' that 'the fabulous Loch Ness monsters' had finally been observed in their underwater behaviour. But when the

team returned the following year no monsters were detected. The chief conclusion of the experiment was 'the fundamental difficulty of making accurate assessments and comparisons of accuracy in such an unpredictable environment'. The ever-changing thermal conditions underwater at Loch Ness rendered medium and long range sonar interpretation problematic. This was essentially a restatement of Peter Baker's earlier conclusion that tracking movement at the loch was 'fraught with difficulty'. Impediments to an accurate understanding of the sub-surface environment included submerged objects and density discontinuities such as the thermocline.

The following year, Professor Tucker published a paper on the difficulties involved in using and interpreting sonar. The Birmingham team did not return to Loch Ness in 1970. That same year David James sent out a private communication to Loch Ness Investigation members:

> While sonar is fascinating, it is an imprecise tool when it comes to giving one dimensions of a living creature and there are good grounds for believing that a full profile photograph, which simply must fall into someone's lap sooner or later, remains by far and away the most effective means of solving our problem.

Sonar had failed to deliver. But in any case, in the absence of convincing photographic evidence, who would be persuaded by marks on a sonar chart? Ted Holiday had already dourly questioned the value of such evidence:

> one can almost hear the entrenched sceptics gently articulating: 'artifact', 'submerged tree-trunk' or 'very large salmon'. After all, having rejected hundreds of witnesses, still pictures and even film, they are not likely to be brought to sanity by a bit of shading on a graph.

Two years later Robert Rines and his 'Academy of Applied Science' produced the first of the Academy's sensational underwater images of a Monster. But even the 'flipper' photographs had failed to persuade the sceptics. The images had been enhanced and the size of the objects shown was hard to determine.

At this point, in the mid-seventies, a new investigator arrived on the

scene. He also questioned the value of sonar:

> More logical underwater methods have been largely discredited through ambiguities in interpreting the results. Obviously, sonar traces are particularly difficult to analyse, whilst even underwater photography, due to the necessity for 'computer improvement', produces indecisive results.

This critic was one Adrian J. Shine, writing in 1975.

Some thirty-eight years later Shine confessed to the BBC that he 'first came seeking fame and fortune, that there was a wildlife mystery and I was the one to solve it'. He went first to Loch Morar, believing that 'here was an easy prize'. Shine told Gareth Williams, 'I came to conquer', and his friend Tony Harmsworth that 'In the early nineteen seventies he decided that he was going to solve the Loch Ness Mystery.' These are revealing admissions, which use revealing language.

Although Nessie has seduced generations of monster hunters, the vast majority were motivated by a desire to obtain the evidence that would unambiguously prove the creature's existence. They wanted to solve the mystery by getting the monster on film at close range. Once this evidence was available, establishment science would acknowledge its blindness and finally get involved. With serious engagement by professional zoologists the species could at last be professionally studied. These early monster hunters were not motivated by a desire for individual fame or the pursuit of the commercial rewards of sensational photographic evidence, even though that might implicitly be the inevitable consequence of such an achievement. But Shine not only sought 'fame and fortune', he wanted to be the first person to solve the mystery. *He* would be the one to obtain unambiguous photographic evidence of the Monster, as well as tangible evidence of its biological reality. He believed that the solution to the mystery was to be found not at Loch Ness but in the clear shallow waters to be found along the shores of Loch Morar. Loch Ness, according to Shine, was a dead-end:

> it is partly the concentration of effort and resources on Loch Ness, which has delayed progress so long. Firstly, the notoriety attaching to Ness detracted from the value of reports from elsewhere and by branding the creature as a unique phenomenon, made its acceptance

> less probable. Then the basic water properties of Loch Ness imposed limitations of technique, leading to inconclusive results.

Shine believed he could succeed where everyone else had failed. As he grandly asserted of his efforts at Loch Morar:

> The object of this expedition has been to establish the identity of the large unknown animal of the Scottish lochs, *evidence for the existence of which has already been adequately assembled.* [my italics]

Years later Shine would reinvent himself as a sturdy sceptic who had known from his very second day of Monster-hunting that eye-witness evidence was unreliable. But this was not the story he told in 1975, when he pointed to 'years of reliable eye-witness accounts, sonar and photographic evidence'. The case for the Monster's existence was beyond dispute. The solution to the mystery simply lay in identifying it. His intention was 'to finish the job'. He would succeed where all before him had failed.

To Shine the reason previous investigations had failed was that they had applied the wrong methods at the wrong loch:

> To a great extent, the opaque, peaty waters of Loch Ness have forced investigators to concentrate upon a surface watch for what is obviously an aquatic animal. This has resulted in very infrequent observations at long range of a very small portion of the creature.

Shine believed he could solve the mystery by bringing a new strategy to bear. The focus would be on Loch Morar, and instead of surface surveillance the search would move underwater. The presence of monsters in Loch Morar was, he believed, indisputable, with sightings dating back a century, as well as more recent evidence obtained by The Loch Morar Survey 1970-1973, which was run by Elizabeth Montgomery-Campbell and David Solomon.

> By far the most significant relevant difference between Ness and Morar is water clarity, Loch Morar having a clarity exceptional in the British Isles. Three eye witnesses report seeing the creature underwater. Here is an opportunity to make, for the first time, a

> committed and logical search within the creature's own largely unexplored environment, with a reasonable hope of unqualified success.

Shine's underwater strategy had two aspects. The first was to maintain an underwater vigil where the water was clearest:

> Evidence from both Ness and Morar, suggests that the monster frequents shallow bays and even that it may have well-established 'patrol lines', which is characteristic of predators in general. If this is so, the creature must frequent the upper layer of water in order to find food.

Shine built a forty-inch diameter fibre glass sphere, which was submerged to a depth of twenty feet and used for both individual and video surveillance. Secondly, a glass-bottomed boat was used to hunt for the remains of dead monsters. Shine raised the exciting possibility of a hitherto undetected monster 'graveyard' lying just below the surface. There was also the remote chance that a living monster might swim below the boat during such a search.

In fact, Shine's efforts at Loch Morar proved just as much of a dismal failure as every other monster investigation. His 'reasonable hope of unqualified success' proved as delusional as the dreams of innumerable other monster hunters. There were no sightings or film of the monster underwater. No traces of dead monsters were ever located. How could there be? There were no monsters in Loch Morar. The Morar 'tradition' was sketchy and unconvincing. There wasn't even a single photograph of the legendary 'Morag'.

Shine was also blind to the inconsistencies of the Loch Ness story. He asserted that the problem was 'very infrequent observations at long range of a very small portion of the creature'. But that simply wasn't true. The classic Loch Ness tradition is stuffed with amazing close encounters. Mrs Mackay first saw her 'monster' just one hundred yards from the shore. George Spicer said he was just fifty yards from the monster as it crossed the road in front of him. Arthur Grant on his motorbike nearly ran the monster down. John McLean saw the monster in some detail at very close quarters by Altsigh Burn. Greta Finlay was sensationally close to her terrifying horned monster. Shine's claim that monster sightings are

infrequent and at long range simply registered the barren reality of the Loch Ness Investigation's efforts. This boiled down to the fact that when you station crews of watchers along the lochside you don't see monsters. The reason for that became obvious over time.

Shine's optimistic belief that he could solve the mystery at Loch Morar collided with reality. When that ambition failed he moved his 'Project' to Loch Ness. Now Shine's former hostility to Loch Ness as a zone of enquiry and to sonar as a search tool was airbrushed from the record. In revising his version of his involvement he later blandly explained how 'we returned to Loch Ness, whose steep-walled uniformity is more favourable to sonar'. This shift in his approach required a rewriting of the history of the Loch Ness Investigation and his own former attitude to sonar. The LNI's approach had been focused on surface surveillance. Shine explained:

> After a 10-year war of attrition against the law of averages, the resulting films brought realisation that possible surfacings were rare, brief, and exposed little that was useful to photography... The false trail ended and the LNI moved underwater. There followed a most significant collaboration between the LNI and the University of Birmingham, which deployed a digital sector-scanning sonar in 1968... Sonar had already produced interesting results in 1962 when used by an Oxford and Cambridge University expedition (Dr Peter Barker [*sic*], *The Observer*, 26 August 1962).

That was in itself an optimistic and revisionist analysis of the failure of sonar at Loch Ness. Besides, if it was true, as Shine claimed, that the monster's appearances at the surface were 'rare, brief, and exposed little that was useful to photography', what did that say about the available corpus of evidence? The classic photographs involved spectacular encounters at close or reasonably close range (Hugh Gray, R. K. Wilson, Lachlan Stuart, Peter O'Connor). Tim Dinsdale's monster was of substantial dimensions and remained on the surface as it crossed the loch. Peter Macnab's monster was equally unmissable. Some eye-witnesses reported unnervingly close encounters. The case for the monster's existence was made from these materials.

In fact, contrary to Shine's interpretation, the LNI's experience did not yield new information about the monster's behaviour. Rather it

demonstrated that it was impossible to replicate what the classic witnesses had photographed, filmed or reported in words. That had profound implications for understanding the nature of the phenomenon. Shine completely failed to acknowledge this, although it had not escaped the attention of others. In 1965 the LNI logged 6,500 hours of watching, to little effect. Ted Holiday was disappointed that the monster 'successfully dodged the most prolonged and systematic watch ever kept for a single species of animal'. He was struck by the peculiarity of the Investigation's barren results at sites which had once proved fruitful. In 1964 there were two sightings of the monster in the loch below Achnahannet. The following year the LNI set up base camp at Achnahannet, maintaining a regular annual watch over this part of the loch for six months, equipped with 35mm movie cameras and 36-inch lenses. Monster sightings promptly dried up.

By 1973 Holiday had drawn the conclusion that something more than simple bad luck was involved:

> An explanation based on chance seemed to me most unsatisfactory. Chance is a random effect; it is just as likely to work in favour of the investigator as against him. If the ten years of intensive effort at Loch Ness which resulted in failure to get a detailed film was the result of chance then it was not a random effect and the expression became meaningless.

This conclusion raised the awesome possibility that the Loch Ness phenomena were 'not animals at all'. Holiday had unwittingly arrived at a conclusion I later articulated in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Searching for the Loch Ness Monster was a futile endeavour because there are no large unknown animals swimming around in the lake's murky waters. The Loch Ness Monster is not a new animal species but rather a phenomenon built from scraps – boat wakes, otters, deer, birds, faked images, hoaxes and numerous other components. But Holiday resisted my own iconoclastic logic. Full-blooded scepticism was literally inconceivable to him. The route out of the cul-de-sac he had discovered took him deeper and deeper into the slack and slippery abstractions of a paranormal explanation.

Shine, having experienced failure at Loch Morar, was obliged to perform a different kind of somersault. His claim that the LNI's surface

surveillance was acknowledged to be a 'false trail' was without foundation. Underwater experiments at Loch Ness were always deployed as an adjunct to loch-watching, not as a substitute. The dream always remained that of unambiguous close-up motion photography. The 1968 Birmingham sonar experiment mentioned by Shine was inconclusive. Earlier in the decade Peter Baker's team had previously used a 'sonic curtain' to sweep Loch Ness and had drawn a blank. Dr Baker had put his finger on the crucial problem with sonar: it was 'too open to artifacts and misinterpretation'. Shine himself simply fell into the same trap as others before him. He located targets, assumed they were monsters, and rushed to publish his sexy results. Later, with a better understanding of sonar and of the loch's capacity to deceive, it would become apparent that those targets were not large unknown animals.

Shine's 1983 article, 'The biology of Loch Ness', endeavoured to put him centre stage as the loch's top investigator, on the brink of establishing conclusive evidence of underwater monsters. It was unfortunate, therefore, when weeks later a book appeared entitled *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* which asserted that the Loch Ness Monster was a myth. Its comprehensive demystification of the orthodox Loch Ness narrative rendered further investigation a somewhat futile endeavour.

Uniquely for someone who is now a Loch Ness superstar, Adrian Shine has never written a full-length book about the monster. His publications list is substantial but consists almost entirely of articles. His only commercial publication outside magazines is the glossy tourist booklet *Loch Ness*, first published in 2006. Throughout his career Shine has generally eschewed polemic and debate. He rarely if ever discusses the classic monster books and their authors and theories. The one exception that I know of is his review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, where the tone becomes distinctly hostile and sarcastic. This is quite out of character and it's worth considering why.

The appearance in 1983 of a book which in its title boldly asserted that the mystery was over was plainly a blow to Shine's personal ambition. He had first arrived in the Highlands ten years earlier believing that 'there was a wildlife mystery and I was the one to solve it'. Now someone had beaten him to it. At the very moment he was hinting that the sonar net of his 'Project' was closing in on the Monster a book unexpectedly appeared which blew apart the case for Nessie. That

demolition job included all the existing sonar evidence and dismissed Shine's own new research as 'inconclusive'.

This all provides a context for Adrian Shine's 1985 review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* in the fringe magazine *Cryptozoology* (now long defunct and not to be confused with later publications bearing that name). It throbs with restrained anger. It also begins with a misrepresentation. Shine asserts that

> He and R. J. Bell (who assisted him) recall how, as students twenty years ago, they considered themselves part of a band of dedicated amateurs at odds with an indifferent scientific establishment.

But that is not what I wrote. What I actually wrote was a generalisation, looking back over the past half century at the loch:

> The quest for the monster has often been seen in terms of a band of dedicated amateurs challenging the hidebound assumptions of a sceptical, indifferent scientific establishment. But the solution of the Loch Ness mystery involves another kind of quest – a quest in which we invite the reader to share.

Shine is equally keen to represent the authors as out of touch. But their involvement was not 'twenty years ago' (i.e. 1963). Shine's wounded vanity simmers throughout the review. His tone is one of magisterial authority and thinly veiled sarcasm, while at the same time managing to include such unfortunate slips as his reference to 'the Lock Ness Monster'. 'In the library,' he sniffs, '[Binns] is in his element' but alas, 'After ceasing in 1972 to be involved in active research, Binns believes he has kept in touch with developments.'

That criticism depends on how you define 'active research'. Shine, whose own interest in the Monster did not begin until nine or ten years before my book appeared, had himself never shown any interest in surface surveillance. He had no knowledge of my various returns to Loch Ness and Loch Morar after the collapse of the LNI. What he really meant by his criticism was that I had not been involved with his own one-man project. Whereas the Loch Morar Survey and the Loch Ness Investigation were relatively democratic organisations, which thrived on teamwork and committees, Shine's involvement at both lochs always involved

volunteers working for him alone. When investigation and research results were publicised the accompanying publicity photographs always focused on Adrian Shine. He was always keen to maintain himself as the man in charge and the centre of attention. This was quite different to those other organisations, where leading figures like David James and Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell kept out of the limelight.

Besides, what does 'active research' mean? For Shine it meant only one thing: his own investigations. In 1975 he was critical of the methods used by others to search for the monster beneath the surface of Loch Ness, dismissing both underwater photography and sonar as 'largely discredited' because of the ambiguous and inconclusive nature of the results. But his own 'underwater methods' at Loch Morar failed to provide the decisive result he'd anticipated. Having trumpeted the superiority of Loch Morar to Loch Ness, and having dismissed sonar as a useful tool, Shine then performed two giant somersaults. He lost interest in Loch Morar and returned to Loch Ness, where he proceeded to hunt for the monster using sonar. His 'Loch Morar Expedition' morphed into 'The Loch Ness and Morar Project' and turned its attention to 'an active study of the environment, in order to place the mystery in context'. Suddenly sonar searches and biological studies became the new orthodoxy, providing Shine with a rationale for his continuing presence at the loch. But neither can be said to have 'placed the mystery in context'. That context required knowledge of the role played by Alex Campbell and the mass media, the social history of Loch Ness, the fallibility of eye-witness perception and the wide range of surface phenomena to be found at Loch Ness.

By 1983 the Loch Ness mystery had been solved. There was no monster. But this was not welcome news at Loch Ness, where Shine continued to justify his presence as an investigator. He had to continue subscribing to the fiction that there was a mystery which remained to be cracked, and that sonar was the right tool to use in this endeavour. 'For the remainder of the eighties, the Project refines sonar analysis', he later wrote, justifying his presence at Loch Ness. But as he had written in 1975, sonar was not an especially useful tool in hunting monsters because traces are difficult to analyse. The medium lays itself open to ambiguity and diverse interpretation. In reality Shine's type of 'active research' was just as much of a chimera as any other form of monster hunting.

'Active research' at Loch Ness has usually been the preserve of solitary

enthusiasts such as Ted Holiday and Tim Dinsdale. To my mind surface surveillance, whether in person or using hide cameras and drones, is every bit as valid as teamwork involving sonar searches or ecological studies. One person's 'active research' is another person's time-wasting folly, according to taste. Arguably the person who has come up with the most interesting and enigmatic movie footage at Loch Ness in the twenty-first century is Gordon Holmes, whose research over a ten-year period has included a series of one-man expeditions using hydrophones, sonar, an underwater camera, helium balloons, a radio-controlled boat and surface surveillance with a camcorder. His approach strikes me as being as valid as anyone else's. It has even yielded interesting results. I don't think Holmes filmed a large unknown animal, but he did record an interesting phenomenon, which was probably a localised wind effect.

In eagerly slapping the label 'dedicated amateurs' on to R. J. Bell and Ronald Binns, Shine was implicitly underlining his own self-appointed status as a professional. It was a supercilious and patronising way of referring to those two organisations, the Loch Ness Investigation and the Loch Morar Survey. But of course, 'dedicated amateurs' is a label which can be attached to virtually all monster-hunters, including Adrian Shine himself. What's more, many of those dedicated amateurs had scientific or other qualifications, unlike Shine, who had none. As far as one can tell (his pre-Monster life is obscure) Shine was a public school drop-out. In 1987, before he became established as a permanent presence at Loch Ness, he was living in what the *Mail on Sunday* unkindly described as a 'dingy £15-a-week bedsit in Wimbledon' as a 'freelance greaseproof paper salesman'. That same year journalist Peter Dunn complained that Shine 'was rather vague about what he did for a living'. The criticism of 'dedicated amateurs' was also a bit rich since Shine's approach to monster-hunting was exactly to imitate that of the original Loch Morar Survey which Binns and Bell had participated in – a monster hunt combined with an ecological study of the loch's habitat. Shine's 'Project' was nothing more than a continuation of the approach pioneered at Loch Morar by that original Survey.

Shine's review went on to denounce my critique of the St Columba sighting as 'pedantic' and he suggested that its location in the river rather than the loch was of no great consequence. In fact, not only does the St Columba episode continue to be cited as evidence of the Monster to this day, but it may well have been instrumental in giving birth to the monster

in the first place, as I suggest in part three of this book. Shine also falsely intimated that there was something personal at stake here, referring to 'the authors attacked by Binns' as 'his contemporaries during his early field research'. In fact, my critique of the bogus Monster 'tradition' referenced five Nessie authors, three of whom I had never met or had any contact with at all: Roy Mackal, Nicholas Witchell and Peter Costello.

Shine's account of the book's contents was far from accurate. For example, he complained that *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* 'excludes discussion of "monster" sightings from other lochs'. This simply isn't true. The book discusses a 'monster' sighting in Loch Arkaig and criticises Robert P. Craig, who wrote that there were only three Scottish monster lochs. I argued that there are in fact dozens of them, including Oich, Canisp, Assynt, Lochy, Shiel and Quoich. The book describes the search for monsters in Irish loughs. The book also considers the sensational McDonnell and Simpson encounter with a Loch Morar monster in 1969. My book even discussed R. L. Cassie's two volume study, *The Monsters of Achanalt* – a very rare account of monsters observed in a tiny, shallow loch in Ross and Cromarty. Even today very few cryptozoologists have read this obscure publication about a hitherto unknown and highly implausible zone of giant monsters.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved devotes a chapter to a critical scrutiny of the role played by Alex Campbell, as both an anonymous newspaper correspondent promoting the idea of a Loch Ness Monster in the 1930s, and as a star Monster witness when interest in the subject revived in the 1960s. Shine concedes that this is 'an important point', but then crushingly asserts that Binns is 'hardly the first to raise these issues'. Yet Shine doesn't name a single person who ever criticised Alex Campbell before 1983 and to this day I don't know of one. It should also be remembered that Campbell's retraction of his original 'Monster' sighting was buried away in the pages of Rupert Gould's *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, which was a very rare book during the golden age of monster-hunting in the 1960s and 1970s. It wasn't commented on because few people knew it existed. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was the first book to draw attention to it. My research in the files of the *Inverness Courier* also exposed Campbell's earlier attempts to promote a 'Monster'. In fifty years of monster-hunting no one had ever bothered to scrutinise the archives of the newspaper which first publicised the existence of a monster in Loch Ness. The results were illuminating but

are not acknowledged in Shine's grudging and grumpy review.

Shine goes on to mention the natural phenomena which are described in the book as sources of deception. He adds, 'Strangely, [Binns] omits seals, one of the more likely candidates.' But he made that criticism in 1985. At the time my book was written and published, the conventional wisdom was that no seal had ever been seen in Loch Ness. After all, even a prominent zoologist such as Maurice Burton unequivocally asserted that 'there are no seals in Loch Ness, nor, so far as anybody knows, have there ever been any'.

All that changed in November 1984 when a common seal was for the very first time recorded as having been sighted in the loch. It remained there until it was shot on 11 June 1985. Shine, reviewing my book *after* this date, was unfairly criticising me for something neither he nor I could have known when my book appeared in May 1983. Seals are a perfectly valid explanation for some classic Monster sightings, but Shine had himself never acknowledged this before 1985. It was only after the November 1984 sighting that an old and discredited explanation became plausible again.

As long ago as 1934, Sir Edward Mountain had acknowledged that 'the best opinion now believes the creature to be a seal. This grows to a much larger size than the seals often seen around the coasts of the British Isles, and in a body of water as comparatively calm as Loch Ness would be capable of making a disturbance which would lead people to believe it much larger than it probably is in actuality.' Seals, Mountain noted, can live indefinitely in fresh water, had a ready food supply in the Loch Ness fish stocks, and are able to travel 'considerable distances' across dry land. Others have noted that seals can display 'horse-like heads'. A grey seal is a very plausible explanation for sightings of the monster in the water and on land: 'Bulls can measure nearly 11 feet long and are as heavy as a Bengal tiger.'

Sir Edward Mountain's insights were lost sight of in ensuing years, blanked out by Constance Whyte's apparently authoritative insistence that seals were never seen in the loch and her insinuation that seals are only ever creatures of salt water:

> A seal entered the sea lock at Clachnaharry on one occasion but the alarmed beast was only too glad to regain its freedom when the gates were re-opened. Seals have also been observed in the river but only

> where it is tidal and never within miles of Loch Ness. The effect of evaporation on the loch is negligible and the turnover very rapid, so that the water is entirely fresh.

No one, including Adrian Shine, ever publicly dissented from the widespread belief that seals were alien to Loch Ness. It was only after November 1984 that a reassessment was due.

After some rather grudging praise of the book's critique of Loch Ness Monster history and mythology, Shine lets rip. 'The second half of the book dealing with evidence, though well written, betrays a lack of technical knowledge, a shortage of practical research, and a complete ignorance of current attitudes.' At this point it is necessary to observe that Shine's review was published some two years after *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was first published in May 1983. When the book was republished as a Star paperback in 1984 it included a Postscript. This was largely devoted to a critique of Shine's *New Scientist* article, identifying 'serious drawbacks to his findings', which included his failure to identify the size of his sonar targets and the use of an inadequate control. It concluded that 'It is easy to overlook the fact that what appears on a sonar chart may be a ghost echo with no material existence at all.' Looking back over the history of Loch Ness sonar 'monsters' this criticism turned out to be all-too true. Shine grumbled that, as far as the sonar evidence was concerned, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* contained 'numerous errors of detail'. But he failed to supply a single example.

It is hard not to see Shine's review as one which combines retaliation for the critical Postscript with cold fury that someone had dared to solve the mystery before he did. Shine's criticisms of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* seem much more an example of what psychologists call 'projection'. It was actually Shine who wanted to be the first to solve the mystery and he was not overjoyed that someone had beaten him to it and, to use his language, claimed the prize. Henry Bauer quotes from a very revealing newsletter which Adrian Shine sent out in April 1980 in which he solicited support and asserted that his Project had 'become, in the eyes of more and more people, the authority on the controversial issue of the Loch Ness Monster'. In a crowded field, Shine sought to be the supreme authority on the subject. He was always keen to underline the superiority of his investigative techniques. In 1975 he wrote:

> Our expedition has used techniques specifically exploiting water clarity to achieve direct observation of the species underwater and to search for actual organic remains. We are the only British expedition to have attempted this.

Suddenly, in 1983, there was the hard, wholly unexpected reality that two ex-LNI members had popped up out of the blue with a comprehensive overview of the subject. Their book title asserted a definitive authority. The Loch Ness enigma had finally been cracked. But if the mystery had been solved and there were no monsters in Loch Ness, where did that leave Adrian Shine? What was *the point* of continuing monster-related 'research at Loch Ness? Shine's whole *raison-d'être* as an investigator had suddenly been kicked away from underneath him. A year after *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* appeared, Shine rationalised his continuing presence at the loch with reference to the debunked eye-witness evidence and the discredited sonar contacts:

> The Loch Ness Project [is] a scientific team engaged in a long term investigation of the mystery. Project leader Adrian Shine said, 'We're the most sceptical investigators so far. But we are greatly impressed with some eye witness accounts and strong, deep sonar contacts. Until we have resolved what they are, we will continue our research. There is no scientific reason why there should not be a relatively large animal in Loch Ness.' (*The Journal*, 13 August 1984)

This was bluster. *Everything* eye-witnesses had seen over the decades could be explained rationally. Sonar searches had indicated a distinct absence of monsters and that the depths of Loch Ness could be every bit as deceptive as the lake was at the surface. Besides, sonar on its own could neither prove not disprove the existence of monsters. In due course, Shine would abandon his sonar drifts and rewrite history to claim that he had never trusted eye-witness evidence. By a marvellous sleight of hand, he would establish himself as a pioneer of scepticism. In this magical transformation it was as if he alone was responsible for the conclusions reached long before him by Maurice Burton, Ronald Binns, Steuart Campbell and others. A latecomer to the field, both as an investigator and a sceptic, he would years later come to be regarded as the man who first saw the light:

> Some feel that the mystery was solved in the 1980s when people such as Adrian Shine synthesised a theory based on various misidentifications of known and not so well known natural phenomena plus the additions of hoax explanations and the occasional visit to the loch by Atlantic Sturgeon.

Understanding the context of Shine's hostility to my book in 1985 requires awareness of the time-lag between the publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* and Shine's review. As far as I'm aware, Shine never responded to my critique of his methodology in the Star edition. Shine's generalisation about 'practical research' and 'current attitudes' was all about himself, not those other monster hunters at the loch.

In one sense his anger was understandable. He had been instrumental in diverting W. H. Allen away from a book by Frank Searle to one by Ronald Binns, only to discover that the Star paperback (which probably had the widest circulation of any of the editions of my book) criticised him as an amateur who did not know how to use sonar in a properly scientific way.

When Shine used his review to attack me for an alleged 'bitterness' towards other monster hunters this was perhaps another instance of psychological projection. No reviewer in the mainstream press detected *ad hominem* attacks or personal axes to grind. Indeed, the American writer Josh Bazell describes me as 'gently' making my criticisms of fellow monster hunters and suggests I even pull my punches, calling me 'ever generous'. In any case, Adrian Shine knew nothing of my time at Loch Ness and Loch Morar. He had no knowledge of my relationships with other monster hunters.

In fact, the one thing I didn't use in my book was personal knowledge. I was having fun when I wrote *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved,* not settling old scores. I didn't mention one prominent monster hunter's doubts about the Dinsdale film, revealed to me in 1964, or information about Tim which was not in the public domain and which could have been used to ridicule him. The tale of Tim and hard-boiled-egg birds remains untold.

I held no grudges and I had no scores to settle. I never met anyone in the monster-hunting world that I didn't like or get on with, apart from one rather creepy individual whom I instinctively disliked, someone who briefly figured significantly in the Loch Ness story but whom I neither

mentioned nor alluded to in the book. I ridiculed Nicholas Witchell's bizarre interpretations of Robert Rines's underwater photographs, but there was nothing personal about it – I've never met Witchell, at Loch Ness or anywhere else. The book mocked only exploits and interpretations which were in the public domain.

Shine says nothing about the book's innovative critique of the first and hugely influential land sighting by Mr and Mrs Spicer or its hatchet-job on similar material, such as the Torquil Macleod episode. As for the corpus of Nessie images, 'In dealing with the classic photographs,' Shine writes, '[Binns] draws heavily upon the conclusions of others, but gives them scant credit elsewhere for their mounting skepticism.' This is another of Shine's characteristically reference-free generalisations. Where exactly were all these sceptical critiques of, say, the Hugh Gray or R. K. Wilson photographs to be found? Besides, where scepticism did already exist I was very keen to cite it, simply to bolster my overall case.

Shine's point can easily be disproved by reference to the Surgeon's photograph. I acknowledged Maurice Burton's later doubts about its authenticity but went much further, writing that 'it may simply have been a model which Wilson threw into the loch… There is also the question of scale.' I suggested that the object photographed was 'possibly only ten or twelve inches in height'. To make my point I even included a comparative photograph of a small fake 'Monster'. It subsequently turned out, thanks to the later researches of David Martin and Alastair Boyd, that my speculation was spot-on. Needless to say, over the past thirty-five years of Loch Ness Monster commentary, no one ever bothered to recognise this. Joe Nickell, reviewing *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* in *Skeptical Inquirer* in 2017, was the first to acknowledge it as 'real detective work by one with an excellent eye and judgement'.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved also supplied a wide-ranging critique of the Dinsdale film, arguing that Tim Dinsdale was in a state of physical exhaustion and extreme 'expectant attention' when he saw and filmed an object which was a boat, not a large unknown animal. It was the first published critique since Maurice Burton's in *The Elusive Monster*, twenty-two years earlier. Burton's attack on the Dinsdale film in that book was a strangely perfunctory one, and his claim that Dinsdale's 'monster' was simply a fishing dinghy containing a line of men wearing 'sou-westers' sitting 'from stem to stern' in a 15-foot dinghy was unconvincing. The fishermen of Loch Ness pursue their sport alone or in

pairs. Half a dozen men (or however many constitute 'a line' – Burton didn't say) would crowd a 15-foot boat. It would not be conducive to very comfortable angling.

The force of Burton's critique was weakened by two other aspects. He owned the camera which Dinsdale had used. If he was so sure of his interpretation, why didn't he himself use the camera to film a line of men in a fishing dinghy from the same location as Dinsdale? Secondly, the 1966 JARIC report insisted that the speed of the object which Dinsdale had filmed was 10mph, too fast for a local fishing dinghy with an outboard motor. Moreover, JARIC concluded that what Dinsdale had filmed was 'probably an animate object'. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* argued that the JARIC report had engaged in circular logic to arrive at its conclusion. Dinsdale, the report argued, could not have filmed a motor boat because he would have identified it as such. But this was to assume that human perception is objective.

In his *Cryptozoology* review, Shine is sullenly reluctant to ascribe any virtues to my wide-ranging assault on the Dinsdale film, even though it was a pioneering attempt to correct twenty-three years of uncritical adulation on the part of the monster-hunting fraternity. Shine says, 'Binns attacks JARIC for its failure to identify the World War II German rocket sites at Peenemunde.' Put in such a bald way Shine makes me sound somewhat eccentric. In fact, I was explicitly responding to Dinsdale's use of this historical analogy to bolster the case for his monster film:

> In *Project Water Horse* Dinsdale heaps praises on JARIC for being 'expert', 'unprejudiced', and 'Heir to a famous wartime tradition, when they had first spotted the German Peenemünde rocket launching sites.' Ironically, the RAF Photographic Interpretation Unit did *not* first discover the Peenemünde rocket sites. It was actually R. V. Jones, the man in charge of scientific intelligence at the Air Ministry, who discovered them, after the 'experts' had spent five days peering at the aerial photographs and spotting nothing. Jones himself points out that photographic analysis is not an objective science: 'what one could see in a photograph was often a matter of subjective interpretation'. It was this factor which actually led JARIC's predecessors to bungle their analysis:
>
> the principal interpreter assigned to the task supplemented his

> powers of observation by a remarkably fertile imagination. What were in fact catapults for flying bombs were, for example, interpreted as 'sludge pumps', a theory perhaps coloured by the interpreter's previous experience as an engineer with a river Catchment Board.
>
> So much for Dinsdale's proud wartime tradition.

In short, I was making the laconic point that Dinsdale was historically wrong in his use of this analogy and that the Peenemünde episode is actually an illuminating one for understanding just how subjective photographic analysis actually is. You would never know any of this from Shine's review.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved prompted a reconsideration of the orthodox narrative in many quarters. In 1986 a formidable new critic of the Dinsdale film stepped forward in the shape of Steuart Campbell. He had spotted something which had eluded me, my co-writer Rod Bell, and every other Loch Ness Monster analyst including Adrian Shine. The abstruse mathematics, calculations and jargon of the JARIC report had obscured the basic reality that the interpreters had never seen the film *projected*. Dinsdale had blocked them from seeing the film in motion. By examining the film only on a frame by frame basis, Campbell argued, the analysts had failed to take account of the breaks in the film where Dinsdale had paused to rewind the camera's clockwork motor. In fact, the report had 'many defects'. The speed of the mystery object was not 10mph and was entirely consistent with that of a fishing dinghy.

In the year that followed publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, Adrian Shine was at Tony Harmsworth's house with Ricky Gardiner, holding a late-night discussion about the Monster and the Dinsdale film. Harmsworth put on a video of an American TV documentary which included extracts of the Dinsdale film. The TV contrast was set too high and when they watched the footage 'in the sequence showing the object moving parallel to the shore, a man could easily be seen sitting in the back of a light coloured boat'.

Shine incorporated this perception into his review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Quoting my argument that Burton was wrong to identify the object as a dinghy, Shine gnomically and loftily remarked, 'Neither Binns nor JARIC examined the film on video. A little contrast adjustment

as the "wake" passes across the field of view is all that is required to determine whether Burton was right.' Shine had only discovered that alleged identification of a supposed helmsman at the back of a boat in 1984, one year *after* publication of my book, so it was ungenerous of him to use private material in this way. Besides, was he right? Henry Bauer later made the valid technical criticism that Shine's analysis was rooted in

> an unspecified television documentary, in other words he worked with several transpositions from the original, with inevitable losses in quality and possible intrusions of artefacts; and his only 'suggestion' of a manned boat was a tiny, film-grain-size blob that he called the head of a helmsman.

Bauer asserted that his own analysis revealed no such helmsman to be visible. Moreover, he was working from imagery with a much higher quality, namely 'an authentic 16 mm copy of the film itself'. Bauer was scornful of Shine's own later attempts to debunk the Dinsdale film:

> Together with Richard Raynor and Richard Carter, Shine attempted to duplicate the Dinsdale film by photographing a boat using the same type of camera equipment as Dinsdale had used. The result looks just like the film of a clearly recognizable boat.

Whether or not Dinsdale understood the significance of Shine's cryptic remark about adjusting the contrast on a video in his 1985 *Cryptozoology* review is unclear. Probably he did. According to Henry Bauer, relations between the two men were of the glacial kind by the mid-1980s. If true, that would certainly explain Shine's peculiar and perfunctory reference to 'T. K. Dinsdale' in his 1983 *New Scientist* piece. According to Bauer, Dinsdale refused to allow Shine access to his 1960 film and felt that his own confidence in it was being undermined by stories that he himself had lost faith in it. At one point he allegedly even contemplated taking legal action, although none was forthcoming.

During Tim Dinsdale's lifetime Shine did not offer any public criticisms of his film, other than in his gnomic comment about video contrast. It was not until 2003 that he published a lengthy paper on the footage. Here he conceded that his obliquely expressed 1985 'helmsman'

interpretation 'was to some extent subjective', but he now he insisted he had been right all along.

In his 2003 paper Shine repeats arguments first made in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* but pushes the time scale back to make it seem as if they are original insights derived from his own work at the loch.

> By 1980, members of the Loch Ness Project had considerable experience in observing boats and wake patterns. They realised that JARIC's contention, stating the lighting conditions during the boat and object film sequences as similar, was incorrect. Not only was the boat sequence filmed some two hours later but the scene is noticeably brighter.

One might ask why Shine waited twenty-three years to publish conclusions like this, which merely echo the unequivocal assertion made in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* that the comparison film was 'bogus' precisely because of the time lag. It was far too long for a loch where the weather and the surface conditions can change dramatically in just minutes.

Shine again presents himself as offering up fresh and original insights when he writes:

> In Fig 4b, the inset shows that a dinghy can 'disappear' into darker water while travelling on the X axis. Surface conditions and the characteristics of wake patterns should now be recognised as crucial factors when interpreting images from Loch Ness and it may go some way to explaining the long running controversy over the Dinsdale film by recalling that JARIC addressed neither of these issues.

But these points were made twenty years earlier in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, which noted that JARIC had avoided analysis of 'wake and wash patterns' on the grounds that this lay outside its competence. The book also quite explicitly refuted Dinsdale's own interpretation of his film:

> Dinsdale claims that his film shows the monster submerging, but all that happens is that the object enters a band of shadow and becomes indistinct… This dark shadow had gone when Dinsdale later filmed the dinghy.

In his essay Shine concludes:

> It should be remembered that Dinsdale did not see the object surface, nor did he see it finally submerge. In driving down to the loch side, he lowered his horizon to the point where he was not able to see the disturbance, let alone a boat at a range of some two miles.

This recycles, without credit, the identical argument made twenty years earlier in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, which concluded: '*Significantly, he* [Dinsdale] *neither saw the mystery object appear nor disappear on the loch's surface*' (italics in the original).

In his hostile review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* Shine made no mention of these pioneering arguments and insights. Twenty years later he effortlessly absorbed them into his own writing, without acknowledgement.

At the time of writing *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* I was unaware that Robert Rines's supposedly 'linked sonar and camera unit' had in reality been wrenched from their positions on the loch bed, producing sonar readings and photographs which were wildly misleading. Incompetent execution and colourfully inaccurate interpretation of sonar charts explained a great deal about the underwater photographs saga. Nor did I know that the famous 'flipper' photograph had been doctored. I alluded to the possibility of a hoax, referring to the famous case of the Piltdown man.

In the weeks after my book appeared Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar carried out their own local research at Loch Ness. They discovered that the Academy of Applied Science's transducer unit was actually free-swinging in 1972. A monster was not responsible for either the sonar traces or the photographed images. The famous 'flipper' pictures had been tampered with. Razdan and Kielar published their devastating exposé in *The Skeptical Inquirer* in its winter 1984-85 issue.

Adrian Shine seized on these discoveries to criticise a book which was in fact their inspiration. He continued: 'When discussing sonar, the best Binns can suggest is that it doesn't work,' he complained. On the contrary, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* lucidly and authoritatively explained that there were 'ambiguities and problems' involved in using sonar, which were compounded by the danger of 'partisan interpretation of complex

technical data'. The Star edition, in its Postscript, extended that criticism in some detail to the sonar work of Adrian Shine himself. Later that year Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar would also question Adrian Shine's competence. His sexy sonar results, published in *New Scientist* shortly before publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, were bluntly dismissed:

> The most recent sonar data to come from Loch Ness are contacts made by Shine during the summer of 1982. Although the sonar traces show apparently strong midwater targets, none of Shine's contacts conclusively demonstrate any horizontal or vertical movement. As with [Robert] Love, we deduce that he probably obtained sonar echoes from stationary mid-water debris.

In other words, Adrian Shine was just another partisan investigator, desperate to read significance into results obtained through a lack of knowledge of the loch's capacity to deceive underwater as well as on the surface. His zealous justification of the value of his sonar searches blinded him to the fallibility and subjectivity of his reading of the data which he obtained. The hyperbole of Shine's breathless *New Scientist* piece – 'Something in the loch has produced some very peculiar sonar traces on some very sophisticated equipment, and that something demands explanation' – was yet another example of an investigator teasingly hinting that the mystery was close to being solved. Shine was evidently ignorant of those 'numerous bits and pieces' of abandoned 'underwater gear' which made Loch Ness such a treacherous zone of sonar investigation. But then again, Shine wasn't present when that material was lost. He was a latecomer to the scene, desperately jockeying to be the supreme authority.

Shine concluded that *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* 'is not really concerned with the largest creatures to be found in Loch Ness, since there is no information given on the environment'. This was another of his gnomic and haughty pronouncements. Chapter Nine of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was devoted to a description of all the wildlife at Loch Ness which can mislead eye-witnesses into believing they might have seen the Monster. It covered everything from sturgeon to otters, birds and swimming deer. The list included both the actual and hypothetical wildlife which were 'the largest creatures to be found in Loch Ness', so it

is difficult to understand what point Shine thought he was making.

Perhaps it is relevant that the manuscript of my book was delivered to the publishers in the autumn of 1982. That same year Adrian Shine published his article, 'A very strange fish?', which speculated about the Monster's identity. It is an article written by a believer. Shine considered the possibility that the Monster might swallow stones for ballast:

> Seals, for instance, have been found with up to 25 pounds (11 kilograms) of stones in their guts. This may also have some significance in the argument that the 'monster' is a reptile or a mammal – if it, too, swallows stones as ballast, these will cause its body to sink to the bottom of the loch after its death.

As late as 1982, therefore, Adrian Shine was still tantalised by the prospect of Monster cadavers on the bed of Loch Ness.

He was equally fascinated by what the Monster might *be*. There was no suggestion in Shine's 1982 article that eye-witnesses might be mistaken or that the Monster was simply an assemblage of miscellaneous phenomena ranging from boats' wakes to otters. On the contrary, the Monster was an unknown animal:

> The presence of an adapted marine fish-predator within the loch is not, in itself, particularly remarkable. What is remarkable is that it seems to be an unknown animal. Furthermore, some of its 'characteristics' raise difficulties no matter what class of animal is considered. It is precisely these features, which make it hard for the zoologist to believe in the 'monster', that will make it such an interesting find.

What is especially interesting about Shine's 1982 article in the light of his 1985 criticisms of my 1983 book is the seriousness with which it treats Robert Rines's flipper photograph. Shine speculated that the Monster propelled itself by its tail, 'with the flipper possibly functioning for steering – or even as a brake'. Shine believed that Rines's image probably showed the fin of a fish:

> The nearest parallel to the 'monster' flipper of Rines's photograph known in nature is, in fact, the fin of an Australian lungfish, which has

> a clear central stiffening and functions as a leg for crawling along the bottom. It could therefore be argued that the flipper is more likely to be the fin of a bottom-roving fish than the propulsive flipper of a reptile or mammal.

Shine left readers of *The Unexplained* with the exciting possibility that Nessie might be 'a very strange fish'. But that the Monster existed and that there was a mystery to be solved was not in doubt:

> Whatever the Loch Ness 'monster' may turn out to be – and we do not at present have enough information to suggest any animal group with confidence – there will be some very interesting questions to be answered, far more interesting than the mere discovery of a 'monster'.

As late as 1983 Shine was a believer.

Shine, who in 1982 took the Rines flipper photograph very seriously, mocked my allusion to the Piltdown man hoax. Here he was rather premature in his understanding of what had occurred. By 1985, in the aftermath of Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar's essay, he had evidently absorbed the fact that Rines and the self-styled 'Academy of Applied Science' were less than competent investigators of sub-surface Loch Ness, but he appeared detached from the possibility that fraud may indeed have been involved.

In retrospect my Piltdown analogy seems quite apposite. The announcement of the discovery of 'Piltdown man' – *Eoanthropus dawsoni* – was made on 18 December 1912. It created a sensation. Fragmentary remains unearthed in Sussex supplied proof of the much sought-after 'missing link'. Satisfyingly, this early example of humanity was found in England. Sceptics were silenced by the later discovery of the remains of a second Piltdown man. The passage of time exposed the hoax. Piltdown man had a brain-case of a similar size to modern humans and an ape-like jaw. But finds of early human remains in South Africa and China in the 1920s indicated that brains were smaller and jaws not remotely ape-like. At best, Piltdown man was an evolutionary aberration. Modern technology supplied the coup de grâce. Fluorine testing carried out in 1949 revealed that the Piltdown remains did not date back to antiquity but were of modern origin. Further investigation revealed evidence of fraud, including the use of paint (probably Vandyke brown).

Piltdown's man's jaw turned out to be that of a young orang-utan.

It took 37 years to establish that Piltdown man was not what he appeared to be. In the case of the Loch Ness 'flipper' photographs it took 40 years before they were very publicly identified as something 'which only he [Robert Rines] could have faked'.

Perhaps the single most revealing part of Shine's review is the sentence in which he denounces the book for 'shortcomings' and attributes them to 'the race to be the first, and a jealous determination to seem alone in its conclusions'. I was unaware of Shine's review for decades and only learned of its existence with the advent of the internet in the twenty-first century. I must admit that when I read it I was startled by his criticism of my 'race to be first' and supposed 'jealous determination'. I had first contemplated writing a book about the Loch Ness Monster in October 1971, at a time when Adrian Shine had displayed no interest whatever in Highland beasties. The book had existed as a slowly evolving idea for over a decade before it was finally written, so it was hardly a question of racing to be first. What finally galvanized me into writing the book was the knowledge that Nessie's fiftieth birthday was coming up in 1983 and yet the same old material was still being served up to the monster faithful. It was time for an iconoclastic hatchet-job by a disillusioned former Monster hunter.

If Shine was a sceptic in 1983 there was no obvious evidence of it. He had started out as an unambiguous believer, who was interested not in supplying further proof of Nessie (which he regarded as overwhelming) but in establishing the creature's biological identity.

Today, of course, Adrian Shine bestrides the Loch Ness scene like a colossus, and has done so for some considerable time. He is the undisputed Monarch of the Glen and the gatekeeper of Loch Ness knowledge. He is the person journalists go to for a quote and whom researchers approach for advice. But back in the mid-1980s his status as the Loch Ness Alpha Male was far from secure.

Frank Searle was, until 1984, a bitter and jealous competitor, whose preposterous assemblage of faked photographs and newspaper cuttings about himself drew in those tourists who ventured along the south shore as far as Foyers. Tim Dinsdale was then still a major presence at the loch, with the fourth edition of *Loch Ness Monster* published just the year before *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Robert Rines remained actively

engaged with the monster and both he and Roy Mackal turned up in 1987 for a symposium on the beast. And Nicholas Witchell was still updating editions of *The Loch Ness Story*, supplying the standard version of the Loch Ness plesiosaur-type monster-hunt narrative. There was a new paperback edition in 1982 and a revised edition in 1989. Where Loch Ness wisdom was concerned, Adrian Shine was just one more figure in a crowded scene. He didn't move permanently to Loch Ness until 1988, some five years after Nessie had been blown out of the water by *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*.

Frank Searle's sudden disappearance in 1984 removed one rival from the Loch Ness scene. Three years later the premature death of Tim Dinsdale removed another. After 1989 Nicholas Witchell ceased updating his *Loch Ness Story* and fell silent. After publishing *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, I had no interest in setting myself up as a permanent sceptic zealously devoted to debunking whatever new 'evidence' received publicity. Ronald Binns faded back into the obscurity from which he had emerged. That left just two prominent figures: Robert Rines and Roy Mackal. In a 1990s Kirk Wolfinger television documentary for Channel 4, Shine shared equal billing with an ageing Rines and Mackal. By this time the American-based Rines was in his seventies and his annual visits to Loch Ness were small scale affairs. Roy Mackal's attention had switched to hunting for dinosaurs in the Congo.

At the start of the new millennium the field was effectively left wide open to Shine. By now he was living at the loch and through his role as curator of the exhibition centre at Drumnadrochit he was able to establish himself as the gatekeeper of the monster narrative. As books about the monster dried up, Shine emerged as the number one expert on Nessie. He had no adversaries to challenge that expertise, other than the remote, marginal figure of Tim Dinsdale's old American friend, Henry H. Bauer. Bauer's account of the souring of relations between Dinsdale and Shine and his own dissatisfaction with Shine's control of the old Loch Ness Investigation archives was buried away on a personal website. At the Drumnadrochit exhibition centre Adrian Shine could rewrite the Loch Ness story on his own terms, putting himself centre stage, complete with waxwork models and photographs of himself. For newcomers to the loch, arriving to test equipment and ideas, Shine was the man on the spot, offering them guidance and expertise. When an opinion was sought by journalists on new monster footage and photographs, Adrian Shine was

always available for comment. When TV documentary makers wanted to do a Nessie feature, who better to turn to for advice than the bushy-bearded sage of Drumnadrochit? When a new author like Gareth Williams came along seeking help, what more authoritative figure could he turn to for guidance than Shine?

'True investigation should simply discover the facts,' Shine would write in the twenty-first century, adding: 'An interesting facet of my work is the discovery of special things about Loch Ness, which shed unexpected light into the controversy; sometimes explaining what people are really seeing.' Describing himself as 'a naturalist', he explained that in 1973 he discovered from personal experience how easy it was to be deceived by 'a classic hump-backed monster which ... wasn't!' In short, however compelling eye-witness testimony might seem, Adrian Shine had learned from the start to distrust it: 'if I am known as a sceptical investigator then it probably goes back to my resolution that night, that if I couldn't trust my own eyes, I shouldn't trust anybody else's either.' Back in 1985 it was a different story. Far from welcoming a book which debunked the eye-witness sightings and offered a pioneering demystification of the Loch Ness saga, Shine's response was hostile and negative. The tone of his review is supercilious and sarcastic. He grandly concluded that 'There are no surprises for current researchers who, in fairness to the eyewitnesses, are tackling the remaining questions.' That the book held 'no surprises' was rich, coming from someone who just weeks before publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was parroting the standard myth that the loch had been a lonely and isolated place until 1933 and who just the year before had been solemnly discussing how Rines's 'flipper' photographs might well show the fin of a strange living animal. Moreover, one might expect a self-styled naturalist to salute the book's inclusion of two remarkable photographs of a deer swimming in Loch Ness – probably the first publication ever of such a phenomenon. Shine couldn't even bring himself to mention it, making a perfunctory allusion to 'A handful of photographs' – a less than generous assessment of sixteen photographs of natural phenomena, including some stunningly 'monstrous' otter photographs taken by the author and his associates Rod Bell and Ian Johnson.

By 'current researchers' Shine meant himself, of course. What 'the remaining questions' which required investigation might be, needless to say, was never explained. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* had blown

Nessie out of the water. There were no large unknown animals in the lake. Nessie was a media creation, aided by the wide range of phenomena at the loch surface which deceived eye-witnesses. The classic photographs were either fakes or natural phenomena, Tim Dinsdale had filmed a boat and the 'flipper' photographs were dodgy. Sonar had failed to deliver the expected results, and Shine's own sonar probes were, my book's Star edition's Postscript argued, using inadequate controls. There was nothing left to investigate. But like others before him, Shine fell back on the eye-witness evidence to justify his continuing presence at Loch Ness.

In 1989, in the course of an admiring profile, Nicholas Witchell saluted Shine for 'his desire to get to the bottom of the mystery and, if possible, to identify whatever it is that has been responsible for so many believable sightings by eyewitnesses.' That this had been accomplished some six years earlier went unmentioned by Witchell. Shine himself has never explained at what precise point he changed from being a believer to a sceptic. In 1983 he magisterially proclaimed that the unequivocal conclusions of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* were 'a little premature'. His friend and admirer Tony Harmsworth has referred to the year 1986 as one 'before the weight of evidence tipped from positive to negative', to which one might reply: what evidence, exactly? That sonar consistently failed to locate monsters had already been established by the work of Peter Baker, Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar. That monsters were not fish predators had been discovered in his own idiosyncratic way by Ted Holiday. That huge, churning multi-humped monsters were merely the lingering wakes of boats had been established by Peter Baker and his team of student observers. That wildlife explained some classic sightings had first been demonstrated by Maurice Burton. That the origins of the Loch Ness Monster were very questionable and that the orthodox 'Loch Ness story' rested on rotten foundations had been shown by Ronald Binns. Steuart Campbell had completed the deconstruction of the Dinsdale film. There was no 'positive evidence' for the monster remaining by 1986, except, cloudily, in the minds of those who would later choose to represent themselves not as grudging latecomers to scepticism but as pioneers.

13

The Bauer War

The story has, I believe, been told more than once in the newspapers, but, like all such narratives, its effect is much less striking when set forth *en bloc* in a single half column of print than when the facts slowly evolve before your own eyes and the mystery clears gradually away as each new discovery furnishes a step which leads on to the complete truth.

Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb' (1892)

The collapse of the Loch Ness Investigation meant no more newsletters or Annual Reports. However, old LNI hand Rip Hepple set up the 'Ness Information Service', sending out *Nessletter*, a short newsletter hammered out on a typewriter, which he reproduced on subscription. It kept interested parties up to date with the latest sightings and other matters associated with the monster.

This obscure one-man fringe publication, which wasn't even printed but reproduced on the technically crude contemporary equivalent of a photocopier, provided the next outlet for an antagonistic review from a Loch Ness activist. It took Henry Bauer two years and one month to publish a review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Adrian Shine's review was a masterpiece of diplomacy and restraint compared to Bauer's.

Henry Bauer counted himself as a good friend of Tim Dinsdale, so he was naturally scandalised by my book's massacre of sacred cows and its explosive demolition of revered icons. Bauer was outraged by *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. His review quivered with rage and fizzed with indignation. For Bauer the book was shockingly perverse and absurd.

'Too silly even to laugh at is the revelation that it was "probably no

coincidence" that Nessie was discovered at the time the film *King Kong* was released in Scotland', he raged. In fact, my pioneering argument about the significance of the timing of this movie in relation to the birth of the Loch Ness Monster and its relevance to George Spicer's eye-witness statement has since been adopted by many later writers. Daniel Loxton views it as highly relevant to the Spicer land sighting; Gareth Williams describes the movie's impact as 'electrifying'. Adrian Shine likewise finds it relevant to the Loch Ness story and George Spicer and mentions it in his booklet *Loch Ness*.

Bauer's initial line of attack was to assert that my book was riddled with inaccuracies. His first example was that 'The Tait photograph was published on 2 (not 3) August 1959 (p. 44).' This was a baffling assertion on Bauer's part, since there is no mention of the Tait photograph on page 44 of my book. There is only one reference to the Tait photograph in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* and that occurs as a footnote on page 156. It does not supply a date for when the photograph is taken. So with his very first example or error, Bauer was wrong. It is hard even to begin to understand where his confusion originated.

His mis-readings continued: 'Sir Edward Mountain's watchers are directly accused (pp. 37-38) of faking photos.' No, they aren't. I have never believed that any of the Mountain expedition photographs are fakes. What his team photographed were undoubtedly genuine phenomena on the surface of Loch Ness. They just weren't monsters. A ten-guinea reward for every Nessie photograph obtained was a mouth-watering invitation to photograph boat wakes, floating logs, tar barrels dumped in the loch by the road workers, cormorants and anything else which might appear suitably monstrous. Ten guineas was a staggering sum of money for Sir Edward's team, who were unemployed men drawn from Inverness labour exchange. Four of the photographs obtained by Mountain's men are reproduced in Maurice Burton's *The Elusive Monster*. Three show what are unmistakeably boat wakes. In at least one of them (probably more) the boat leaving the wake must have been very visible to the photographer.

Bauer then goes on to claim that 'The Mountain expedition of 1934 did not get 21 photographs in 2 weeks (p. 37) – there were 21 *sightings* but only 5 *photographs* in *4 weeks*.' Yet again, it is Bauer who is comprehensively wrong, not me. It was Sir Edward Mountain himself who wrote:

> During the first fortnight of the search, however, visibility was very good, and various watchers secured a total of 21 photographs. Of these, five were good enough to warrant enlarging for use in publications. The watchers saw the creature at other times but had no opportunity to get a photo, while in other cases actually snapshots were made, but on development proved to have been focused into the sun.

Bauer's determination to find fault where none existed is pervasive. (Ironically, he has elsewhere confessed 'I'm compulsive' and 'I tend to paranoia over any administrative slight or blunder.') Referring to *The Loch Ness Story*, Bauer asserts that 'Witchell's revised edition (p. 162) was published by Terence Dalton, not by Penguin.' Wrong yet again – Penguin did publish a revised edition and I own a copy.

Some of his criticisms are merely differences of interpretation. Referring to the 1960 film, Bauer asserts that 'Dinsdale's hump left only a wide bow-wake.' But in the first place identification of the indistinct object in Dinsdale's film as a hump is wholly subjective. It is simply an unidentifiable object. To judge whether it is the back of a huge animal or a boat requires going beyond the testimony of the cameraman, Tim Dinsdale. The screw wake the object leaves is perfectly visible to anyone whose interpretive skills are not warped by a desire to see a monster.

Elsewhere, Bauer has poured scorn on the 'swimming dog' explanation for the object in the Hugh Gray photograph. While I share his view that Gray didn't photograph a dog I have no difficulty in understanding why some analysts detect the outline of one. Bauer, revealingly, cannot see it at all.

Ultimately there is no nit that Bauer isn't keen to pick. With reference to my brief, passing mention of Cherry Island he asserts: 'A crannog was a fortress, not a "round farm homestead".' No archaeologist would agree with Bauer's dogmatic certainty. Cherry Island is possibly 2,500 years old and has never been professionally excavated. Crannogs like Cherry Island are believed to have had multiple uses over the centuries, according to the different needs of their changing occupiers. These varying uses, among others, are believed to include roundhouses, homesteads, refuges and fishing lodges. Some years later Henry Bauer completely contradicted himself. In an online essay he referred to Cherry Island as 'a crannog, an artificial island built by homesteaders'.

Having identified a string of errors which actually only existed in his own overheated imagination, Bauer concludes: 'It is not easy to avoid the suspicion that Binns deliberately misread and misrepresented in order to bolster his argument.' But that Bauer was a wholly unbalanced reviewer can be illustrated by two examples.

Of Rupert Gould, Bauer sputters: 'Binns denigrates this man incessantly'. Oh really? Twenty-one years after Bauer's review the first-ever biography of Gould appeared, written by Jonathan Betts of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. It's a very authoritative and scholarly biography, which covers every aspect of Gould's complex personality and diverse interests, including the Loch Ness Monster. Betts singles out just two books on the monster for attention in connection with Gould. The first is *More than a Legend*, whose author, Constance Whyte, is described as being 'respectful of Gould's work'. Betts then goes on to discuss, at rather greater length, 'Another important work on the subject, and one which discusses Gould's contribution in some depth.' This is my book, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Betts concludes his chapter on Gould and the monster:

> One thing is certain, Binns is correct in suggesting that had it not been for Gould's interest, his hard, disciplined, intelligent research in December 1933, and the resulting publication of this book [*The Loch Ness Monster and Others*], the whole subject may well have returned to obscurity, with any further sightings going unreported for fear of ridicule. As it is, interest in the Loch Ness Monster and Sea Serpents has never diminished since, and whether one is a believer or not, the phenomenon has provided us with much food for thought and scope for debate.

Fortean Times reviewed Betts's biography, commenting

> Betts, by his own admission, knows little of Forteana, and if the book has one failing it is that its (finely detailed) account of Gould's contributions to our field cannot match that of his achievements in horology. There's nothing, for example, to equal Ronald Binns's revealing analysis, in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, of Gould's influential excursion to Loch Ness.

Bauer was equally scandalised by my account of Anthony 'Doc' Shiels and his photograph of the monster, complaining that I say 'Shiel's [*sic*] exploits are "wearisome".' To which I might reply that at least I manage to spell Shiels's surname correctly, unlike Bauer (whose review manages on one occasion to mis-spell my own name as 'Binn' and who also refers to something called the 'pleasiosaur'). I was hardly alone in my scepticism about Shiels's monster photograph, which the ever-gullible Tim Dinsdale unwisely used for the cover of the final edition of *Loch Ness Monster*.

A few years after *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* appeared I was introduced to Doc Shiels at a publishing event in London. He bore me no ill will at all for my book and suggested we go off for a chat in a nearby pub. We drank some beers and had a very amicable discussion about monsters and the paranormal. At the end of it, the Doc gave me a copy of his magazine *Nidnid*, which I treasured and still have today. I enjoyed his company. The Doc is a genuine 'character' and a Dickensian eccentric – one of those people who add a little colour to mundane everyday reality. He is a showman and a surrealist, with a great sense of humour. Whereas no one, I think, would ever choose to describe Professor Bauer as possessing the true comic spirit.

The year after his *Nessletter* review appeared Bauer's monster book, *The Enigma of Loch Ness: Making Sense of a Mystery*, was published in the United States by an academic press. According to the description on the dust-jacket, the book was

> much more concerned with examining the sociological, psychological and philosophical aspects of the Loch Ness controversy than with proving or disproving Nessie's existence.

Bauer, it was claimed

> shows that the Nessie phenomenon has much to tell us about the nature of the scientific enterprise, and about the adversarial relationship between mainstream science and 'fringe' subjects such as Nessie.

But this supposed objectivity was as much of a sham as the claim that the

book approached its subject from a broad, wide-ranging angle. *The Enigma of Loch Ness* is a narrow, tendentious work of monster advocacy which excludes the arguments of both sceptics and the 'wrong' kind of believers alike.

The book purports to show how the reality of the Loch Ness Monster exposes deficiencies and flaws in the methodology of modern science when faced by 'unconventional and unclassified fields of potential knowledge'. But, remarkably, Bauer nowhere addresses the well grounded *scientific* objections to the idea of a large unknown animal in Loch Ness. Nor, despite his grand talk of 'the sociological, psychological and philosophical aspects of the Loch Ness controversy', does he take a holistic approach. Far from 'Making Sense of a Mystery' (the book's sub-title) Bauer sidesteps a multiplicity of issues which relate to the origins and subsequent history of the monster (not least the historical, social and biographical-psychological aspects). For Bauer the only difficulty impeding proper scientific enquiry is the unevenness of Nessie literature. To this end he adopts a lofty tone of ostensible objectivity and detachment, supposedly balancing the various claims of interested parties.

Bauer surveys previous books on the monster and magisterially concludes that 'About half...do gross disservice to the reader and thus also to the publicly made case for the Loch Ness creatures.' For Bauer, some monster books are repositories of scientifically valuable data, while others (including the two sceptically orientated books) are damaging. Oddly, the book which incurs his greatest displeasure is a rather unexpected choice: 'Most dangerous, perhaps, is the book by [Peter] Costello, *In Search of Lake Monsters* (1984).' He asserts that 'the text is replete with errors ranging from mere sloppiness to absolutely wrong statements'. But Peter Costello's real crime, one suspects, is that he labelled Bauer's friend and mentor Tim Dinsdale a 'fanatic'. This is surely what earned him Bauer's wrath, not a scattering of unimportant minor errors in his book (far fewer in number than those to be found in the first edition of Dinsdale's *Loch Ness Monster*). All authors make minor slips. For example, Bauer's own 'Reported Sightings' list is not accurate. Bill Wright's sighting is attributed to 17 June 1978 and *Nessletter* 28 is cited as a source. But the detailed description given in that issue identifies the sighting as having occurred on 23 June. And earlier, in 1938, referring to the Brodie sighting of August 30, Bauer cites *More Than a Legend*, p. 195.

But there is nothing at all about this sighting on that page. It is actually found on p. 46.

'The public simply does not know who the real authorities on Nessie are,' Bauer grumbles, before proceeding to offer up enlightenment. 'Among the monster hunters one finds individuals of the highest ability and calibre,' he solemnly asserts. Bauer reserves particular admiration for four outstanding contributors to the truth about monsters. Rupert Gould and Constance Whyte are saluted for 'energy and common sense, wide culture and high education'. Two individuals in particular attract Bauer's gushing respect:

> Dinsdale's competence in engineering and in photography are linked with intense intellectual curiosity and a deep sense of ethics, the ethics appropriate to truth seeking as well as the much more difficult practical ethics of dealing with other people. The teams organised by Robert Rines offer a dazzling combination of the highest expertise, in photography generally and underwater photography in particular, in sonar, and in electronic gadgetry in general. Their work should, in time, come to be seen as a model of how one looks at a novel problem…

The passage of time has only served to magnify just how eccentric and preposterous these evaluations were.

'The Monster is a Myth', the first chapter of *The Enigma of Loch Ness,* purports to set out the case made by the sceptics. However, it makes no reference to the sceptical counter-narrative of local people in 1933 and it makes no mention of the lucid objections made by leading members of the British scientific community in 1933. W.T. Calman, Keeper of Zoology at the Natural History Museum, wrote a withering attack on the Monster which was published in December 1933. Bauer avoids all mention of it. Similarly *The Enigma of Loch Ness* has no description or summary of the arguments put forward in *The Elusive Monster* and *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Bauer can hardly bring himself to acknowledge either of the only two sceptical books which then existed, and when he grudgingly does so later on in his book he lumps these two dissident authors in with fraudster Frank Searle, magisterially dismissing all three in a single sentence: 'Another book, Searle's *Nessie*

(1976) is by a man whose integrity has been brought into real question, and Burton's *The Elusive Monster* (1961) is an exemplar of specious reasoning, as is the recent book by Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (1983).' In what way the content of this last book is 'specious' (i.e. apparently right but lacking real merit) Bauer does not trouble to explain. A footnote refers his American readers to Bauer's own review in that very obscure English publication *Nessletter*. An unbeliever might dryly note that the adjective 'specious' is very much applicable to the Loch Ness Monster, since its secondary meaning is 'pleasing to the eye but deceptive.'

In supposedly putting forward the sceptic's case Bauer mentions Maurice Burton but only to misrepresent him wildly. Within the typical approach of the sceptic, Bauer writes, is the argument that 'Dinsdale's unique film could be one of Burton's hypothesized mats of vegetation'. This is as blatant and wilful a misrepresentation as one could ever hope to encounter in Loch Ness literature, since not only has no sceptic ever argued any such thing but not even the great proponent of the gas-filled vegetable mat theory, Maurice Burton himself, ever applied his theory to the object in the Dinsdale footage. On the contrary, Burton argued that what Dinsdale filmed was a boat, and the passage of time has shown that Burton was correct. But the question of what the object in the Dinsdale film really is cannot be separated from the human context in which the film was taken – an aspect which Bauer characteristically chooses to ignore.

In misrepresenting the sceptical case, Bauer mentions 'The fact that almost all the monster sightings are very brief – a few minutes or less.' But this is not a 'fact' at all. Bauer's insistence on the brevity of sightings is a classic example of how the Loch Ness story is rewritten to justify the failure to produce convincing evidence. In the early years people saw the monster for long periods of time. On 22 September 1933 Miss J. S. Fraser and three other women at Altsigh watched a long-necked monster for over a quarter of an hour. B. A. Russell observed a long-necked monster swimming steadily across the loch for 12 minutes. Margaret Munro famously watched the monster through binoculars for 25 minutes. Duncan Cameron saw the monster near Urquhart Castle displaying its long neck and head; it was on the surface for 20 minutes. Two Benedictine Brothers at the Abbey watched the monster through a telescope for half an hour. The monster's generous exposure of itself

continued in later years. Tim Dinsdale saturated himself in monster lore for a year and then headed to Loch Ness for the first time, confident that the monster was 'enormous, and that if it surfaced it might splash about for ten or twenty minutes'. Ted Holiday interviewed a local man, Alastair Grant, who in 1963 saw the monster from the shore and then had time to board a boat and pursue it down the loch: 'We saw it for about twenty to twenty-five minutes.' On 15 June 1965, Ted Holiday believed he and two other witnesses had enjoyed 'the longest continuous sighting on record' – about one hour in duration. And Roland Watson states that, 'of the 292 sightings on the database that I use which state a duration, about 8% last more than half an hour'.

But when the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau stationed volunteers with binoculars and powerful cameras along the lochside, lengthy sightings stopped occurring. It is precisely this kind of anomaly which interests sceptics. But Bauer comprehensively ignores the revisionism which regularly features in the long-running Loch Ness story. This revisionism applies both to the monster's identity and its behaviour and to the changes in narrative required in order to maintain a belief in this supposed animal. Likewise, when Bauer talks about 'genuine sightings' he blithely sidesteps the question of why some sightings should be determined as genuine and others as false. On whose and on what authority and by what criteria?

In 1934 Sir Edward Mountain famously organised the first large scale investigation at Loch Ness, stationing men with binoculars and cameras along the lochside. Describing that episode some twenty-five years later, Tim Dinsdale ruefully noted that 'it was inconclusive, the vital close-up pictures were never obtained'. Dinsdale concluded that there was a need for 'a major expedition, planned, equipped and sustained on a scale beyond the resources of private individuals'. That dream came to fruition almost immediately with the founding of the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau. After ten years of surveillance the results were identical to those of Mountain's investigation: it was *inconclusive* and *the vital close-up pictures were never obtained*. This is exactly what one would expect if there were no monsters in the loch and the eye-witness sightings were erroneous and exaggerated.

Another red herring of Bauer's is the claim that sceptics believe that the monster was invented to benefit the ailing local tourist trade. Here Bauer supplied a myth of his own discovery, introducing a conspiracy

theory involving 'Lester Smith' (the minor novelist D. G. Gerahty), who claimed that in return for £50 he manufactured Nessie as a publicity stunt on behalf of local hoteliers. Gerahty's boast was an empty one, however, since there is not a scrap of evidence to support it. Gerahty claimed that a hotelier from Lossiemouth ('not far from Loch Ness' – in fact much too far away to benefit commercially from Nessie) knew that 'for centuries a legendary creature was supposed to dwell in Loch Ness'. That can't be true as there was no such tradition. 'All we had to do was to arrange for the Monster to be sighted. This we did and the story snowballed.' But the sighting which launched Nessie was Donaldina Mackay's and it is preposterous to think that this random event was 'arranged'. And the monster only 'snowballed' after it was carefully cultivated by Alex Campbell. There is not the slightest reason to believe that Gerahty was in any way connected to Campbell, and Campbell himself needed no outside encouragement to promote his beloved water kelpie. His motive was ideological, not economic.

No one could possibly have anticipated how the story would gain traction in 1933, for reasons to do with the role of the media in modern society and the ways in which Loch Ness provided a fertile environment for seeing 'monsters'. No serious sceptic believes in this kind of Nessie conspiracy theory, just as no serious sceptic believes that eye-witnesses have consumed rather too much whisky or are outright liars.

Bauer's basic thesis is that modern science is ill-equipped to deal with claims for anomalous phenomena which lie outside the framework of conventional knowledge. But Ronald Hutton puts it very well in connection with another discipline when he explains why professionals have good reason to be cautious of unqualified enthusiastic amateurs:

> Practitioners of archaeology and history, confronted by an enthusiastic amateur or set of amateurs with an unorthodox idea, have virtually no practical incentive to test it. In most cases they may feel instinctually that there is something wrong with it, based on their knowledge of the context concerned, but to disprove it usually requires a significant amount of work, which must be subtracted from their own research, and – if the result is negative, as expected – will attract no interest, and win no regard, from their professional peers. The only people certain to be interested in such a process of testing are those who propound the idea in the first place, and who are likely

> to be aggrieved and resentful if the end result reached by the professionals does not confirm their hopes.

Henry Bauer is blind to the reality that claims for anomalous phenomena have a long and disreputable history, which understandably encourage caution among professional scientists.

14

Symposium

'Don't take Magnus seriously,' said Dan. 'At best he's an enthusiast for Scottish lore.'

Muriel Spark, *Symposium* (1990)

In July 1987 the Society for the History of Natural History and the so-called 'International Society of Cryptozoology' (ISC) organised a joint Symposium at the Royal Museum of Scotland, which by hosting it lent spurious authority to these proceedings. The ISC was optimistically described by one participant as a 'scientific society'.

Its first day was devoted to presentations on the Loch Ness Monster and it included familiar figures, who lacked any scientific qualifications whatever, or, in the case of Roy Mackal, qualifications irrelevant to the identification of a hypothetical lake monster. The symposium's lack of objectivity was underlined by the absence of the two most prominent Nessie sceptics. As no invitation to attend was sent to me I found out about it only later. This was another small symptom of the way in which the Loch Ness story has from time to time involved gatekeeping and jockeying for position by gigantic egos. Excluding from discussion the author of a comprehensive demolition of the case for Nessie showed that where this symposium was concerned minds were closed and positions rigidly fixed. Not that in the long run any of this mattered, as the grandly named 'International Society of Cryptozoology' in due course fizzled out and became as extinct as Gef the talking mongoose.

When Gareth Williams states that 'The opposing camps' (i.e. the sceptics and the believers) met at this symposium he is quite wrong. The

sceptical case wasn't put by anyone. Mine wasn't the only absent voice. Also missing from the list of speakers was Steuart Campbell, who was Edinburgh-based and whose debunking book *The Loch Ness Monster: The Evidence* had appeared the previous year.

Among the speakers were the two individuals who had written the fiercest reviews of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*: Adrian Shine and Henry Bauer. At Loch Ness, Adrian Shine had continued hunting monsters. Publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* raised one difficulty for Shine. If the mystery had been solved, and there were no monsters in the loch, what was there for any investigator to do? Shine's solution was to insist that the eye-witness evidence justified a continuing search. This would continue to be focused on sonar probes of the loch.

As a research strategy this was inherently contradictory. In the first place, if what eye-witnesses said they'd seen actually existed then surface photography must sooner or later capture the monster on film. But Shine was contemptuous of surface surveillance, which was irrational in terms of logic but pragmatic after the failures of the LNI. In any case, sonar searches had a veneer of objectivity and scientific respectability. However, while sonar might in theory be able to establish the presence of a school of large underwater creatures, it could never disprove their existence. In practice it was simply impossible for sonar to track every part of the loch simultaneously. In any case, it was always possible for believers to argue that the monster might evade detection by burrowing into the sediment on the bed of the loch, by seeking some part of the loch out of reach of sonar beams or by hiding up one of the rivers that feed into the loch. Apart from those possibilities, sonar raised questions of interpretation when targets were identified. Below the surface Loch Ness could be as deceptive for the sonar operator as it was at the surface for the watcher on the shore.

The attitude of the speakers at the symposium to the arguments and conclusions put forward in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* and Campbell's *The Loch Ness Monster: The Evidence* was simply to ignore them. Instead, as far as this assembly of cryptozoologists was concerned, the story was just as it had always been. Reporting on the Symposium for *Fortean Times*, Mike Dash regretted that 'The three sessions dealing with the Loch Ness phenomenon were a little disappointing, being of an almost exclusively retrospective nature.' Richard Fitter, the former LNI director, now appearing in his capacity as 'the Chairman of the Fauna

and Flora Preservation Society', recapitulated the bogus and discredited Loch Ness story, talking of sightings recorded as far back as 1520 and describing how, until the main road was built from Fort Augustus to Inverness, Loch Ness 'was still almost as remote as on the day, more than 150 years before, when Samuel Johnson rode along its shore'. The ignorance of the social history of the Great Glen remained breathtaking. Fitter plainly had never troubled to read *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*.

With a total lack of irony Fitter wrote:

> One might almost conclude that taking part in an expedition to find Nessie militates against seeing the phenomenon which is under study. There is certainly a real mystery here.

Also present was Roy Mackal, once again earnestly presenting possibilities of identification for a monster whose size was, in his eyes, a matter of scientific fact rather than a fantasy constructed from a variety of questionable sources. By now Mackal had 'abandoned his favoured "hypothetical amphibian" theory and added an equally hypothetical zeuglodon – a form of prehistoric whale, serpentine but short-necked – to the list of possibilities.'

Henry Bauer reiterated the arguments put forward in his recently published book, *The Enigma of Loch Ness*. Analysis of a selection of pro- and anti-monster literature led him to a risible, ostensibly 'scientific' conclusion which one imagines was greeted with rapture by the audience: 'The frequency of moderate or serious errors increases markedly from articles expressing belief to those expressing disbelief.' But as I have already pointed out, Bauer's accuracy cannot be relied upon when it comes to determining error. His own writings are careless and unreliable.

Two presentations dazzled attendees with data. Paul LeBlond and Michael Collins's 'The Wilson Nessie Photograph: A Size Determination Based on Physical Principles' set out some abstruse calculations involving wind, waves and meteorological conditions in April 1934 which led to the exciting conclusion that the height of the neck in the Surgeon's photograph was 1.2 metres. It would be some years before it emerged that their paper rested on a series of assumptions which were entirely false, rendering their confident 'scientific' conclusion worthless. The date and weather conditions when the Surgeon's photograph was obtained are, in fact, unknown.

Adrian Shine's and David Martin's 'Loch Ness Habitats Observed by Sonar and Underwater Television' put forward a justification of the Ness and Morar Project's underwater research, asserting that 'its prime role lies in demonstrating the presence of something of interest in the first place'. The fact that two books had now argued that there *wasn't* was simply sidestepped. Shine and Martin remained in thrall to the sightings record:

> In considering alternative explanations for the sightings record, it is noticeable that they actually point to accuracy of observation and vindication of quite bizarre experiences. It would seem difficult on this basis, to dismiss close-range observations by local people, who simply describe something powerful in the loch.

There is some very contorted and contradictory logic at play here, masked by a vacuum of reference. Which particular sightings? What bizarre experiences? Which local people?

If by 'alternative explanations' Shine and Martin meant the naturalistic explanations put forward by sceptics such as Steuart Campbell and myself, these can hardly be said to endorse 'accuracy of observation' by the eye-witnesses. There is always a gap between the explanation of the sceptic and the insistence of the eye-witness that what was seen was a large unknown animal. Far from accepting the accuracy of the eye-witness, the sceptic always insists that the observer was *wrong*, exaggerating size or distance or shape, or all three.

Shine and Martin's 1987 paper basically boiled down to the thesis that the eye-witness testimony was valid and that the continuing mystery was being tackled scientifically by examination of the underwater environment. Under the blizzard of statistics was the implicit suggestion that there really was at least one large creature in the loch, which was quite possibly some kind of fish. Excitingly, the Project's use of sonar had encountered 'occasional contacts, which are exceptional in terms of strength and depth'. These merited further enquiry.

Gareth Williams represents Adrian Shine as attending the symposium in the role of pioneering scientific investigator and sturdy sceptic up against the ranks of believers, which included Henry Bauer. In this account only Adrian Shine had anything new to say. But this adversarial image is at odds with the content of Shine and Martin's paper, which goes

out of its way to salute Bauer's book, hailing it at one point as 'perceptive'. It even alludes to a divide between science and fringe ideas, 'as described so well by Bauer'. Instead of challenging Bauer's apologia for the Monster, Shine and Martin deferred to it. This was a long way from the sturdy scepticism of Williams's revisionist account.

The speaker who 'went down well and earned himself the loudest and longest applause of the conference' was Robert Rines. He

> gave an impassioned speech in which he criticised armchair speculators and 'book authors'. They 'do no service to cryptozoology… They don't want to know anything real – it might interfere with their theories,' he said. The debunkers were 'the enemies of cryptozoology,' Rines asserted…

By 'book authors' he presumably meant Ronald Binns and Steuart Campbell. Time has shown that the scepticism of these writers was entirely justified and that what Rines represented as 'real' combined misrepresentation with deception.

With characteristic hyperbole, Rines hinted he would be returning to the loch with some recently declassified US government equipment which would see 'practically everything' underwater. Needless to say, this was simply bluster designed to excite a gullible audience. No such amazing search tool ever materialised at Loch Ness.

Although Shine presented new data about sonar contacts at this Symposium, the basic reality remained. The mystery had been solved. There was no monster in Loch Ness. The sturgeon had already been identified as a possible source of some monster sightings. Exploring the loch's underwater habitat could, at best, only refine conclusions which had already been reached by others. Contrary to the narrative presented by *A Monstrous Commotion*, Shine's Project was as much about justifying his continuing presence at the loch as it was about enhancing an understanding of a monster whose existence had been comprehensively refuted. Nineteen years after the Symposium, Shine published *Loch Ness*. At its heart is a sceptical presentation of 'Misleading Monsters' and 'Illusion', which nowhere acknowledges that every single one of its explanations and conclusions had been made decades earlier by Maurice Burton, Ronald Binns and Steuart Campbell,

before even a single word had been uttered at the grand Symposium of 1987.

The presentations made at the Symposium were republished the following year in *The Scottish Naturalist*, with a Preface by David Heppell of the Department of History, National Museums of Scotland. Identifying the Loch Ness Monster as 'one of the world's great unsolved mysteries' Heppell continues in words which, curiously, seem to ventriloquise Adrian Shine:

> The serious investigators are familiar with seals and otters and deer and driftwood, and if all or any of these have been responsible for reports of the Monster, they are gradually being eliminated from the puzzle. Those anomalies which remain after the layers of misunderstanding and wishful thinking have been peeled away are the key to the eventual unravelling of the scientific truth.

In this tendentious version of the Loch Ness story there was still a mystery waiting to be unlocked. But there wasn't. The idea that there was a 'scientific truth' still waiting to be revealed at Loch Ness was itself wishful thinking on the part of those seeking to justify the further investigation of a non-existent animal. The explanation for the Monster's existence lay as much in the archives of the *Inverness Courier* and in the psychology of individuals like Tim Dinsdale as it did in natural history.

In short, Shine was not yet a sceptic, merely a revisionist believer. As Nicholas Witchell explained in 1989, 'he does believe there is something'. For Shine the eye-witnesses were telling the truth and there *was* a monster, albeit not of the size and shape envisaged by Tim Dinsdale. It was

> perhaps something rather smaller than the identikit Nessie: possibly something which is a variant or large version of an animal with which we are already familiar.

In his thinking Shine had progressed no further than Maurice Burton in 1961, for whom the monster was also a probable 'variant or large version of an animal with which we are already familiar' – in Burton's case, a giant otter.

Shine's version of the Loch Ness Monster has proved as elusive as

Dinsdale's. No new and hitherto unknown evolved adaptation of a known animal has been discovered at the loch. Even Shine's twenty-first century enthusiasm for the Wels catfish or the sturgeon as keys to the mystery faces the obstacle that no specimen of either species has ever been caught at Loch Ness. And even if a large, dead catfish or sturgeon was discovered floating at the loch surface tomorrow it could not possibly explain the diversity of the sightings record or supply the single magic key unlocking the Loch Ness story.

Two years after Shine's review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* the narrative changed again. According to one reporter: 'After early scepticism, evidence from sonar convinced 37-year-old Mr Shine that further investigation was needed.' This was a prelude to 'Operation Deepscan', which would put Adrian Shine centre stage again.

In October 1987 Adrian Shine organised the grandly titled 'Operation Deepscan', which the media were informed was a '£1 million hunt for Nessie'. The 'Operation' claimed to be definitive:

> The 20 motor cruisers, loaded with computers and sonar equipment, will sail side by side along the 23-mile Loch Ness, recording every fish and beastie that moves and everything else that doesn't. A back-up flotilla will scan the 700ft depths with cameras.
>
> Adrian Shine, leader of the three-day Anglo-American operation, said: 'It will be the largest scientific expedition ever undertaken on the loch.'
>
> One of the team said: 'This is a curtain through which nothing can escape.' (*Daily Mirror* 24 August 1987)

This 'scientific expedition' involved twenty-four cabin cruisers staffed by scouts, sea cadets and unemployed young people. The probe resulted in three signals which seemed to be bigger than could have been produced by any of the known species in the loch and which Shine told the press were 'deep, midwater contacts of considerable strength'. Nicholas Witchell rather underlined the futility of Shine's approach when he concluded that the exercise provided further proof of Nessie's existence: '"Operation Deepscan" may not have added to our knowledge, but it would seem to have played its part in confirming it.'

In fact, Operation Deepscan cost no more than £6,000 and was much less comprehensive than the hyperbolic press coverage suggested. Only 60 per cent of the loch's deep water was probed, for just two and a half days. In reality no comprehensive sonar search of Loch Ness has ever taken place and there are plenty of places where a monster could, in theory, elude searchers. Stoney Pool at Invermoriston is one such location [Plates 25 and 26]. In November 1933 Rupert Gould even met a local man who told him how he had once seen 'a huge creature' in this pool. It was 'some 30-40 feet long, with a head like an eel and a long tapering tail'. Later, when Operation Deepscan's exciting deepwater contacts were written off as probably just reflection artefacts, there was still plenty of wriggle room left for believers.

Among those attending the July 1987 symposium was Tim Dinsdale, who learned that he had been elected to 'Honorary Membership of the International Society of Cryptozoology'. The public announcement of the award paid tribute to his dedication to the Loch Ness investigation, and to his honesty and integrity. But this encomium added the curiously stinging qualifier, 'Regardless of whether such an animal exists or not…' Scepticism was eating away at the old certainties. Tim Dinsdale died five months later, of a massive heart attack, at the age of 63.

1987 was also the year that *Arthur C. Clarke's Chronicles of the Strange and Mysterious* was published. Based on a long-running TV series featuring the distinguished science fiction author, the book examined mysteries from around the world. These ranged from the Nazca lines and cases of spontaneous combustion to ghost photographs and lake monsters. In 1979 Tim Dinsdale had collaborated with the programme makers and appeared on the show. He could hardly have been pleased with the approach that the book took to Nessie. Its angle was sceptical, and the Loch Ness Monster section began by recommending that there was one book which 'should certainly be read in full by anyone planning an expedition to Loch Ness'. That book was *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, which included an entire chapter devoted to debunking the Dinsdale film.

Concentrating exclusively on the case against the monster, *Arthur C. Clarke's Chronicles of the Strange and Mysterious* reiterated key arguments by myself and Steuart Campbell and concluded:

> The monster-hunters, assailed as they increasingly are by the carefully researched doubts of the sceptics, can bask in one certainty: the world wants Loch Ness to have a monster. While there is a chance, however faint, that such a creature may exist, the search is sure to go on.

But things were beginning to flag at Loch Ness. No research strategy, whether at or below the surface, had produced convincing, unambiguous evidence of large unknown animals in the lake. Dinsdale's tetchy comment, not long before he died, that 'Nessie in the [19]80s has, if anything, been going backwards', sounds like a gloomy acknowledgement that scepticism was becoming embedded as the new common sense.

The following year Fortean Tomes, the publishing arm of the magazine *Fortean Times*, published Michel Meurger and Claude Gagnon's *Lake Monster Traditions: A Cross Cultural Analysis* – a rewritten and expanded version of the authors' 1982 book, *Monstres des lacs du Quebec: myths et troublantes réalités*.

It's in every sense a fabulous book, lavishly illustrated, which seeks to reinstate the cultural context of lake monsters and the grip which such cryptids have on the human imagination. Although only marginally concerned with Loch Ness, it put forward a way of making sense of lake monsters which is far more interesting than the conventional battle between believers and sceptics involving the lobbing to and fro of sighting and photography interpretations. Needless to say, it is a book which, though embraced by sceptics, has been comprehensively shunned by the shrinking and shrunken community of believers.

In 1989 the final edition of Nicholas Witchell's *The Loch Ness Story* appeared. It was probably the single most commercially successful title of any ever published on the monster, going through many editions and enjoying mass market publication and circulation. The book's sales may have been helped by Witchell's growing prominence as a journalist with BBC TV news. In this last edition the story was more polished but essentially unchanged, apart from a grudging acknowledgement that where Rines's underwater photographs were concerned it was possible that 'a mistake was made in their interpretation'. If so, 'it was an honest

mistake'. Apart from that everything was still tickety-boo: the Surgeon's photograph, the Dinsdale film, the eye-witness sightings. Witchell was still in denial and nowhere more so than in his last chapter, which summarised events since 1975.

Since the previous edition of *The Loch Ness Story* seven years earlier, two books had appeared which demolished the case for Nessie and asserted that the loch was devoid of large unknown animals and always had been. You would never have known this from Witchell.

With bland dishonesty he reported that 'The fiftieth anniversary of the start of the search came and went quietly in 1983.' That the Loch Ness Investigation had incubated a heretic who'd brought the entire house of cards crashing down was nowhere acknowledged. The name 'Ronald Binns' was not to be allowed to disturb the soporific tranquillity of true believers.

With extraordinary impudence Witchell even claimed that sceptics were 'entirely to be welcomed and encouraged' but only if 'they have done a little basic fact-finding of their own'. This remark was the prelude to an attack on 'one such sceptic, a man by the name of Steuart Campbell. He was making notes for a book he was hoping to write in which he would reveal Nessie for what, in his opinion, it really was: a load of hysterical nonsense.'

Witchell did not have the courtesy or the honesty to admit that Campbell's book had in fact been published and had been preceded by articles by its author in reputable magazines demolishing the Dinsdale film. Like Henry Bauer, Nicholas Witchell was congenitally incapable of engaging with the sceptical case against Nessie, which was far more comprehensive and sophisticated than either of these authors cared to acknowledge.

15

Gatekeeping

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord.

Tennyson (1850)

In 2006 Adrian Shine published a glossy tourist booklet, *Loch Ness*. It was his first published attempt to address the monster story in its totality and it recast the Loch Ness saga as a drama centred on his own involvement. It was a message reproduced locally at the Loch Ness Exhibition:

> These days, the Drumnadrochit Hotel is under the control, ideologically speaking, of Adrian Shine, the most famous skeptic in the Nessie game. A 59-year-old Englishman with a great big Rasputin beard and a way of speaking that oozes professorial authority, Shine has built his name poking holes in the theories of Rines and the other believers. His Loch Ness Exhibition Centre, which now fills the original hotel building, features a 30-minute-long multimedia attempt to discredit claims of the monster's existence.
>
> ...People have seen something, Shine agrees, but that doesn't mean they've seen a prehistoric monster. What they've glimpsed, he believes, can be explained as either biological, physical, or psychological: They've seen some other, known animal; they've been fooled by a wave or a wake; or they see something because they *expect* to see something.

In this version of the Loch Ness story, naturalist Adrian Shine brought

scientific rigour, objectivity and a decades-old sturdy scepticism to the subject. Other central figures in the story – Alex Campbell, Rupert Gould, Constance Whyte and Tim Dinsdale – are rendered invisible or are shunted to the margins and reduced, at best, to footnotes. So, too, are other prominent figures who wrestled with the contradictions and problems of the Loch Ness saga, such as Maurice Burton and F. W. Holiday. The sceptical tradition is likewise erased from the record.

What Shine's publication leaves out is every bit as interesting as what it includes. Its 32 pages contain no less than six colour photographs of Shine, of which the most revealing is the one on the back cover. It shows Shine at an oak desk in a wood-panelled room which exudes gravitas, tradition and authority. Dressed as a Highland laird with a tartan tie, a tweed waistcoat and matching jacket, this Englishman from Surrey is transformed, unmistakeably, into the Monarch of the Glen. His position as the Alpha Male of Loch Ness is underlined by the other components of the portrait. Shine's forefinger touches an unidentified A4-size soft-bound document, pointing at an unidentified passage. This document is presumably one of Shine's own essays about Loch Ness. Significantly, it rests upon a book which is easily identifiable: the first edition of Tim Dinsdale's *Loch Ness Monster*. A blue page-marker protrudes from Dinsdale's book, which is face down on the desktop.

This apparently innocent author portrait is as replete with symbolism as a renaissance painting. Quite literally, Shine's version of the Loch Ness story has come out on top. Dinsdale is vanquished, tipped over, face down. In *Loch Ness*, Shine shrinks Dinsdale's involvement with the Loch Ness story to just six sentences, all to do with his 1960 film. These sentences are devoted to Shine's 'helmsman' interpretation of the object filmed by Dinsdale. Curiously, Shine now claims that this interpretation was made 'in 1982'. This is completely at odds with Tony Harmsworth's account (approved by Shine), which places it in 1984. Why would Shine choose to advance the date of his great discovery by two years? In 1983 *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* unequivocally asserted that Dinsdale's monster was a boat. By retrospectively claiming he had discovered this a year earlier, Adrian Shine was perhaps once again seeking to underline his credentials as a man who was ahead of everyone else – the first investigator to solve the mystery.

What is striking about *Loch Ness*, apart from its revisionist account of Shine's involvement, is the way Shine takes the credit for the research

and discoveries of others. His account of the Surgeon's photograph blandly states that 'it was exposed as a hoax at the Loch Ness Centre' and is illustrated by a photograph of Shine with a model Nessie. There is no mention of Alastair Boyd and David Martin. Likewise the sections on 'Misleading Monsters' and 'Illusion' draw on the work of other researchers whose efforts go uncredited. Later there are acknowledgments to those who have worked with Shine – crammed into the final page, using a miniscule font.

As he explains in an introduction, Shine's thesis is that the Loch Ness mystery can only be understood by examining the lake as 'an underwater environment, a hidden world. That is why, as a naturalist, I tend to study the things which can't be seen ... simply by staring at it.' This was a sly dig at both Tim Dinsdale and the Loch Ness Investigation, reiterated later in the booklet when Shine congratulates himself for his 'indirect, scientific approach' which revealed 'much more than any amount of standing about with cameras and binoculars'.

But there is a vast sleight of hand going on here. Knowledge of the loch's underwater environment adds very little to our understanding of the Loch Ness Monster, which originated as a creature of the mass media and which has always involved unidentified phenomena *on the loch surface*. The scepticism of the scientific establishment of 1933 has turned out to be entirely justified, rooted as it was in doubts that a large unknown animal could have eluded modern knowledge in an environment as publicly accessible as Loch Ness.

Surveillance of the loch surface was a perfectly sound way of attempting to solve the mystery by establishing first and foremost that there really *was* a Loch Ness Monster. Once proof of its existence was established the way would then be clear for serious scientific involvement. In the face of the scepticism of the British zoological establishment it was important to accumulate unambiguous photographic evidence.

The fact that the efforts of Sir Edward Mountain in 1934 and the LNI in the 1960s and 1970s yielded barren results indicated that the solution to the mystery lay in understanding how the mystery had originated and what exactly it was that witnesses were seeing on the loch surface. A comprehensive knowledge of surface phenomena in turn led to an understanding of how that might be processed by fallible human perception. Maurice Burton was half-way towards solving the mystery when he published *The Elusive Monster* and understood that Greta

Finlay had misperceived a deer and Dinsdale a boat. Burton also grasped that the monster's behaviour was at odds with the behaviour of marine animals, which do not create immense turbulence at the surface. But Burton's analysis was flawed by his failure to research the origins of the mystery, by his naïve acceptance of some of the classic photographs, and by his lack of field experience. His gas-filled vegetation hypothesis was not evidence-based and he was emotionally still in thrall to a residue of eye-witness sightings and the tantalising possibility of a large unknown animal, albeit one which was land-based.

Various conclusions could be drawn from the failure to film what eye-witnesses regularly reported seeing. Ted Holiday's embrace of the paranormal was one way out of the cul-de-sac. The simplest, most obvious solution was that the sceptics had been right all along. There was no monster and before 1933 there never had been. This of course was the assertion of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* – the first book to go back to 1933 and scrutinise how the story developed in the pages of the *Inverness Courier*. It was also the work of two individuals who had extensive knowledge of the loch and its environment, one of whom was an experienced naturalist and a former zookeeper.

The problem for Adrian Shine was that once *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* had appeared, what exactly was there for him to do? Why persevere with an investigation when the monster had been exposed as the fantasy of Alex Campbell, aided and abetted by over-enthusiastic eyewitnesses who had misperceived a variety of phenomena? Shine's response was to insist that he, as an investigator, owed a duty to the eye-witnesses. The volume and quality of this evidence was just too strong to be dismissed in the way I had done.

Twenty years later, his position as top dog secured, he told a very different story. In *Loch Ness* he explains that it was at Loch Morar that he had an encounter which transformed his understanding of the mystery:

> In the dusk, I had seen a classic hump-backed monster which … wasn't! Over the past decades, I have never lost my personal interest in the question of lake monsters but if I am known as a sceptical investigator then it probably goes back to my resolution that night, that if I couldn't trust my own eyes, I shouldn't trust anybody else's either.

Tony Harmsworth describes how during the late 1980s he became 'quite depressed about all of the scepticism which Adrian [Shine] exuded'. He asked how he could be a sceptic when there were literally hundreds of eye-witness sightings of the Monster. Shine then told him the story of his false 'monster' sighting. Having been deceived into thinking that a rock was the monster in motion, he lost all faith in other people's testimony. He could 'no longer be sure' of eye-witness evidence.

Shine first visited Loch Morar, alone, in 1973, returning with others in the summers of 1974 and 1975. He told Tony Harmsworth of the occasion 'during his early days at Loch Morar' when on his second day he saw the monster. He was alone at the loch, rowing along the shoreline.

> He passed a headland and then something took his breath away. A huge black hump was emerging from behind the headland and making for deeper water.

Shine decided to row back and confront the creature.

> As he got closer the animal appeared to be ignoring him and still slowly, but steadily moving from right to left into the deeper water.

He reached the headland and came close to the monster.

> Then he stopped. All became clear. The monster suddenly resolved itself into a long rock, absolutely stationery [*sic*]. It was not alive after all.

Shine discovered that his own motion and perspective had created the illusion of a moving object.

Twenty years after confiding his moment of revelation to Tony Harmsworth, Shine told a slightly different version to a *Boston Magazine* journalist:

> Shine's quest began with an encounter. In 1969, he set out to investigate a mystery at Loch Morar, a lake to the west of Loch Ness that has its own tradition of curious sightings, and where, allegedly, a boat had recently been attacked by a water monster. Shine rented a rowboat and paddled around Loch Morar one night with a camera. As

he was rowing along the dark northern shoreline, he saw a hump, 'very much like the ones I'd seen drawn in books of sightings,' emerge from behind a promontory. 'I stopped rowing. It stopped moving. I took a photograph…and waited for it to move.' It didn't, so he rowed toward it.

As Shine drew near it, the hump began to look like a huge, submerged head. 'I got closer,' he said, inserting a pregnant pause. 'It was a rock'—another dramatic pause—'so all my perceptions had actually been wrong. And I vowed that night that if I couldn't believe my own eyes, I wasn't going to believe anybody else's, either.'

In this version Adrian Shine began investigating Loch Morar even before the Loch Morar Survey (1970-1973). He was sceptical of the eye-witness evidence from the very second day of his active involvement with lake monsters.

The year of his arrival at Loch Morar is false, advancing the reality by some four years, but as an anecdote his bogus 'monster' experience is persuasive. An observer in a moving object is not necessarily best equipped to perceive accurately another object. New arrivals at monster lochs, brimming with belief and enthusiasm, are primed to perceive all kinds of surface phenomena as unknown animals. But there are two objections to Shine's version of his embrace of scepticism.

Firstly, although rocks might well be mistaken for something monstrous at Loch Ness, this could only be by someone whose view is momentary and who does not return to the location. No one could mistake a rock at Loch Ness for 'a huge black hump' simply because there are no rocks of a suitable size. There is only one truly monstrous rock at Loch Ness and that is the so-called 'witch's stone', on the shore just to the east of the harbour below the Clansman Hotel. This has never been confused with a monster, because it is unmistakeably a very large rock and is too high above the loch surface, too close to the shore and too large and irregular to be mistaken for anything else (Plate 21). There are much smaller rocks around Loch Ness which might be mistaken for a single small black hump by someone spotting them from a passing motor vehicle, but they are usually close to the shore. No one in a boat could ever mistake them for a monster.

This is in sharp contrast to Loch Morar, which does indeed have some large, long rocks of deceptively monstrous dimensions and appearance

protruding from the surface along both the north and south shores (Plates 22-24). In other words, *Shine's experience could not have occurred at Loch Ness*. In his booklet, *Loch Ness*, Shine's illustration of 'Misleading Monsters' includes a long 'upturned boat' rock. There is no rock which remotely resembles this illustration at Loch Ness but there are lots of them at Loch Morar. His illustration of a 'log' with a large hump and long slender head and neck is equally exaggerated and implausible. No one has ever photographed such a serpent-shaped log floating in Loch Ness. Nor, as far as I am aware, has Shine ever published his photograph of the 'monster' rock of Morar.

Secondly, the self-congratulatory version of Shine as a sturdy long-term 'sceptical investigator' who had long understood the fallibility of eye-witness accounts is completely contradicted by his 1980 statement that 'If we have any faith in human nature, then the sheer volume of testimony justifies the search.' It was a song he was still singing five years later when he wrote that 'current researchers' (i.e. Adrian Shine and his Project) were soldiering on 'in fairness to the eyewitnesses'. These glaring contradictions with his later rock monster anecdote have long been lost sight of, assisted by Shine's own air-brushing of his publications record. The 'Loch Ness Alphabetical Authors Index' on Shine's website references a wide range of publications, but his own listed contributions to the literature omit his writings for a populist periodical like *The Unexplained* and elsewhere.

Loch Ness raises the question that if it was true that Shine had lost all faith in eye-witness testimony some time between 1969 and 1973, why then did he insist all those years later that such evidence required his presence at Loch Ness? Shine's image of himself as a long-time sceptic is at odds with his behaviour in the 1980s. His decision to persevere with sonar searches and to accumulate data about the loch's sub-surface environment was a strategy which, at best, could only refine the negative conclusions of the earlier sceptics. Curiously, Shine's admirer Tony Harmsworth asserts that it was only after 1986 that 'the weight of evidence [for the Monster] tipped from positive to negative'. It is hard to think of any defining moment or sensational piece of research in the late 1980s which clinched the case against Nessie. That case was made, comprehensively, in 1983. Everything since that year has merely reinforced the uncompromising conclusions of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*.

In reality the decades-long history of sonar searches at Loch Ness has essentially been one of the over-excited identification of mysterious targets presumed to be monsters followed by a steep learning curve which acknowledged the severe limitations of these once-confident identifications. The sub-surface loch proved to be just as deceptive for sonar operators (whose competence and professionalism was at times in serious doubt) as the surface was for inexperienced observers. In any case, though in the long run sonar has strengthened the case for an absence of monsters, it could never decisively prove it. If you don't believe in monsters then sonar is a pointless tool since the reality that there is no monster can be more persuasively established in other ways. As, of course, it had been by 1983. *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* articulated conclusions which were already implicit in the work of Maurice Burton and Ted Holiday.

Likewise, the study of the loch's depths indicated further difficulties with the monster hypothesis. Low fish stocks created problems for the notion of a family of large predators, although this particular conclusion had been reached long ago by professional fisherman Ted Holiday and was instrumental in leading him to his final, colourful conclusion that monsters must therefore be phantoms from another dimension. Here Shine performed another somersault: from insisting that the loch contained enough fish for large predators he later decided that it didn't.

Shine's *Loch Ness* concentrates exclusively on the sub-surface environment, describing the geological history of Scotland and the Great Glen, the archaeology of wrecks on the loch bed, the loch's underwater habitat and known life forms, and its still under-researched seiche (or giant underwater wave). But very little of this material has any bearing on the rich and complex saga of the Loch Ness Monster, which Shine retells in a very selective way, with himself as the star turn.

Apart from ignoring or marginalising the traditional 'Loch Ness story' (in which Rupert Gould, Constance Whyte, Tim Dinsdale and Alex Campbell all play leading roles), Shine's booklet blanks out two crucial dimensions of the story. The first is the natural history of the loch around the shores and on the loch surface. This is an odd omission for someone who identifies himself as a naturalist. No information is given about types of deer or deer stocks around the loch. There is nothing about otters or wild goats. Seals receive only a perfunctory mention. There is no account of the types of birds to be found at the loch, or bird behaviour.

The woodland around the loch is ignored, as is the presence of floating vegetation in the loch. The rich diversity of animate and inanimate bodies to be found on the surface of Loch Ness is neither described nor analysed, even though it arguably provides the major source of eyewitness sightings.

Secondly, *Loch Ness* omits the rich social history of Loch Ness. But this aspect is crucial for understanding why the absence of a reported monster before 1933 makes the possibility of a large unknown animal species in the loch so unlikely. For centuries the Great Glen has been a major communications route and the regular passage of travellers and visitors helped to support local towns and villages, which were once far more populated than today. Local history also helps to explain the origins of the monster myth in 1933 and why it captured the imagination of Alex Cambell, midwife to the beast.

Shine, however, is keen to reinstate the discredited notion of a nineteenth century sightings tradition. *Loch Ness* begins with the grandly authoritative statement 'It all began in 1882, just as stories of a "huge fish" were circulating in the village of Drumnadrochit. Here, the old inn which stood on the loch-side road was being rebuilt in the sumptuous Victorian Baronial style.' This is a version of the Loch Ness story which relocates its historical origins and geographical centre away from Abriachan and Fort Augustus, which both have prior claims. Abriachan was the site of the only nineteenth century episode connected to a mystery fish in the loch, as well as being near where the first 1933 sighting was reported. Fort Augustus was where Alex Campbell lived and where the monster was quickly verified as a creature of loch and land, with a local tradition. Drumnadrochit, by contrast, was inland, some distance from the loch.

Loch Ness is a text without footnotes or sources. It is impossible to verify Shine's questionable assertion that stories of a huge fish circulated in Drumnadrochit in the 1880s. His use of apostrophes makes it seem as if 'huge fish' is a direct quotation but there is no pre-1933 evidence of any such stories, and if any such tradition was claimed after 1933 Shine fails to identify it. His claim sounds very much like a creative rewriting of one of the anecdotes told in D. Murray Rose's letter to the *Scotsman* on 20 October 1933, which stated that 'In the summer of 1885, stories were circulated about a strange beast being seen by many people about Loch Ness.' But as I pointed out in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, Murray

Rose's much-cited letter cannot be regarded as reliable. No one has ever been able to locate a single written or printed source for any of his colourful claims.

The reason for Shine's construction of a 'huge fish' tradition becomes plain at the end of *Loch Ness*, where he puts forward the suggestion that a solitary Wels catfish or a sturgeon could account for the monster mystery. Here, for the first time, Shine gives credit to named individuals. It was Shine himself who, as he modestly acknowledges, 'noticed particularly that bottom-dwelling fish tended to surface in calm weather; conditions associated with most monster sightings', including 'The huge predatory European Catfish, the Wels'.

In fact, the catfish had been around as an explanation for the monster from the very beginning, because of its size and 'repulsive appearance'.

Shine, very unusually, acknowledges the insights of another monster expert:

> Dick Raynor, an experienced investigator, points out that a Wels could live for 100 years. A single specimen introduced by man could account for the whole of the modern sightings record without ever reproducing!

This is, to put it mildly, questionable. That sightings since 1933 can be explained by a single fish rather begs the question of which sightings should therefore be rejected and which accepted as The Real Thing. Shine also provides no pictorial or written information at all about the appearance or behaviour of the Wels at the surface – rather crucial elements in any analysis.

The other possible large fish in the loch, which as an explanation Shine characteristically attributes to himself ('In 1993 I suggested a much larger and rarer visitor to British rivers') is the sturgeon. In fact, this identification had been made from the very beginning and I enlarged upon it in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. Back in 1934 Rupert Gould considered it, acknowledging that 'In some ways the sturgeon theory is rather attractive.' Head and neck sightings might simply be 'the snout of a huge sturgeon, raised temporarily above the surface' with its serrated back giving the impression of a line of humps. But if eye-witness accounts of the monster's size were correct it would require 'a sturgeon of quite enormous size; one say, 60 feet long – or nearly three times as large as

the biggest yet known'. The fixed shape of the sturgeon also militated against it being the monster, which had humps which varied 'as to size, number and interval'. It was also improbable that the bony plates along the crest of a sturgeon's back could ever be mistaken for 'a single, large, smooth hump'.

Ironically, the sketch which Gould used to illustrate the sturgeon theory was taken from his book *The Case for the Sea-Serpent*, where it had been created purely for the purposes of satire. It had been manufactured 'more or less as a parody upon the ingenious theories, with equally ingenious illustrations, evolved by Lee'. This was a reference to Gould's *bête-noire*, the marine biologist Henry Lee. Lee was a believer turned sceptic, whose book *Sea Monsters Unmasked* provided a variety of rational explanations for sea-serpent sightings. Gould's sturgeon sketch was intended to mock Lee's debunking methodology. Now he recycled it as a superficially plausible explanation for monster sightings in Loch Ness, only to dismiss it on the grounds of size and shape. Revealingly, this was the identical logic which Gould had used to dismiss Lee's sea-monster explanations. Lee believed many classic encounters could be explained by encounters with a giant squid, including the Hans Egede sighting of 1734.

Gould rejected Lee's analysis on the grounds both of size and inconsistency with the eye-witness evidence. Here there is a curious anticipation of events as they would later unfold at Loch Ness. Gould treated the sketches of sea-serpents by observers and the eye-witness statements as being objective and factual in every particular. Similarly, with the Loch Ness monster Gould's objections to sceptical explanation owed everything to eye-witness reports being credible as to size and appearance. However, his knowledge of the loch was perfunctory and his faith in the objectivity of human perception was plainly unwarranted. The remarkable multi-humped monsters of *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* have long since been discredited. High-speed monsters, massive turbulence and frothing commotions have also all failed to survive into the modern age as part of an enduring eye-witness record.

Adrian Shine's enthusiasm for the catfish/sturgeon explanations makes perfect sense in terms of his own focus on Loch Ness beneath the surface. If the solution lies in the depths and not at the surface or on the shoreline then it supplies a broad justification for his underwater exploration approach. But, of course, while the presence of a solitary

catfish and/or sturgeon cannot be ruled out, such a presence could only ever supply a small part of the sightings record. It was Shine himself who in 1980 conceded that 'most sighting reports do not seem to describe a fish' – a perception rather at odds with the conclusion he reached twenty-six years later in *Loch Ness*.

It is striking that among the various omissions of *Loch Ness* is a rather important aspect of the story – the land sightings. In *The Monsters of Loch Ness*, Roy Mackal listed eighteen land sightings, expressing doubts about eight of them. Paul Harrison's *Encyclopaedia of the Loch Ness Monster* (1999) listed twenty-five, of which the most recent was in 1979. Even Maurice Burton accepted that the classic land sightings were evidence of an unusual animal at the loch. But Adrian Shine simply ignores such sightings, which makes *Loch Ness* a less than adequate account both of the monster story and how it might be interpreted.

Shine's very narrow account of the Loch Ness story continues up to the 1960s, when he mentions the Loch Ness Investigation and claims that 'Now the "Drum" Hotel became the gathering point for generations of investigators.' This is a bizarre claim, since it was a competing establishment, the adjacent Drumnadrochit Lodge Hotel, which was the focus of the LNI crowd. No one caroused at the Drumnadrochit Hotel, which was generally regarded as a dull, quiet establishment for the well-off and the elderly. All the action was at the Lodge. Shine couldn't know that because there is no evidence he was interested in monsters at this point in his life.

It was not until 1980, by which time the golden age of monster hunting was over, that the Drumnadrochit Hotel established a connection with Nessie. This was a purely commercial one. That year a Loch Ness monster exhibition opened, designed by Tony Harmsworth and financed by the hotel's new owner, Ronnie Bremner. The two men, newcomers to the area, quickly rediscovered what the LNI had learned. There is a huge market among tourists passing along the north shore A82 for a visitor centre which provides information about the Loch Ness monster saga. Nessie is globally famous. Everyone has heard of the monster but very few people are aware of its history. 'The Loch Ness Monster Exhibition' at the Drumnadrochit Hotel was an instant hit. This was a blow to Shine, who had been planning his own exhibition and who already had a small display about his work featured within the Great Glen

Exhibition at Fort Augustus. Shine proposed to Harmsworth that in return for a donation of £7,500 to finance future sonar investigations of the loch, his monster exhibition would enjoy 'exclusive exhibition rights to evidence collected with that equipment and options to display the other Project material'. Harmsworth was unsure if the hotel's proprietor would agree to this arrangement, but Bremner and Shine held a meeting in London 'and the deal was done'.

In 1987 a competing exhibition opened next door, at the Drumnadrochit Lodge Hotel. A battle for visitors began which continued until 2018, when the rival attraction closed. The one based at the Lodge called itself 'The Famous Loch Ness Monster Exhibition', later changed to 'The Original Loch Ness Visitor Centre', and then 'Nessieland'. 'The Loch Ness Monster Exhibition' became 'The Official Loch Ness Visitor Centre', which was later changed to its current name, 'The Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition'. Harmsworth's relationship with Bremner soured and in 1990 he ceased to have any connection with the business. In 1999 Adrian Shine persuaded Bremner to allow him to take over the content and design of the exhibition. This evidently proved to be a lucrative relationship for both men, with the profits of this very successful exhibition helping to finance Shine's continuing presence at the loch, and Shine's Project-centred version of the Loch Ness story lending the exhibition the appearance and authority of an objective, science-based account. Or as Shine puts it in *Loch Ness*, 'Support for the loch's exploration provided by the public exhibition guaranteed that the enterprise would become a true research centre for everything of significance since [the 1960s].' *Everything?* This exaggeration is characteristic of Shine's rewriting of history.

The Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition is today a shrine to Adrian Shine's version of the Loch Ness story, in which he is a towering figure. He is repeatedly present in the exhibition itself in the form of photographs and waxwork models of himself. Visitors pass through six darkened rooms, subjected to a series of short films which boom out a supposedly objective account of the Loch Ness habitat and the monster. It is a version which blanks out the orthodox narrative, in which Alex Campbell and Tim Dinsdale are central figures, and substitutes one in which the natural history of Loch Ness is described through the prism of Adrian Shine's involvement. At the end visitors pass into a room displaying a few artefacts, videos of eye-witness accounts and other

miscellanea. From there it's a short step into 'The Nessie Shop' (soft toy monsters, T-shirts, novelty souvenirs and 'Scottish Music'), 'The Kiltmakers' (cashmere and woollens, tartan, 'Scottish Jewellery', etc.) and 'The Whisky Shop'. The 'Ancestral Names Research Centre' promises that no matter what surname you have 'we will be able to find out where you came from!' There is also the option of a 60-minute trip on Deepscan ('named after the famous Expedition carried out on the loch in 1987'). For two adults and two children it costs £48.

Visiting The Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition in 2016, I looked to see what Nessie books were on sale there. After all, the brochure promises 'A huge variety of Nessie memorabilia' and 'A large selection of books and literature'. In fact, *not a single book about the Loch Ness Monster was on sale*.

I wasn't surprised that Tony Harmsworth's paperback wasn't displayed, in view of the book's critical account of the establishment's original proprietor, Ronnie Bremner. In a Centre devoted to Loch Ness and its monster I did, however, expect to find two titles in stock. Gareth Williams's *A Monstrous Commotion: The Mysteries of Loch Ness* had been recently published by a major commercial house, to critical acclaim. But it was nowhere on sale. And while you wouldn't expect to find Roland Watson's self-published paperback *The Water Horses of Loch Ness* on sale in a bookshop, you would think that it would be available in a specialist outfit like The Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition. But neither title was there. Anyone wishing to pursue an interest in Nessie was instead invited to purchase a copy of Adrian Shine's glossy booklet, *Loch Ness* – available in prodigious quantities.

Surprisingly, *Loch Ness* contains a number of errors. Sir Edward Mountain's team obtained twenty-one photographs, not five. Father Gregory Brusey's sighting was of a neck eight feet tall, not ten. JARIC did not state that the object at the head of the wake filmed by Dick Raynor was eight feet long but rather 'in the order of seven feet'. The dead animal found on the beach at Abriachan was a bottlenose whale, not a dolphin. There is no specific evidence that George Spicer had seen *King Kong* prior to his sighting – it was only prior to his interview with Rupert Gould several months later. The claim that LNI personnel were 'seldom naturalists' and 'often…engineers' is without foundation. Tim Dinsdale did not shoot 'a 4 minute film' but rather one lasting sixty-five seconds.

Ironically, the two occasions on which Adrian Shine has made a

significant contribution to a greater understanding of the Loch Ness story are in the areas of archival research and surface observation of the loch. It was Shine who in 1990 stumbled upon the long-forgotten 1975 *Sunday Telegraph* item about the Surgeon's photograph, and who encouraged David Martin and Alastair Boyd to ferret out the truth. Five years earlier, Shine witnessed leaves and branches on the loch surface moving against the wind, and concluded that the loch's seiches (underwater waves or 'internal waves') sometimes rise high enough to create movement at the surface. The conventional belief was that this wave action was a deep-water phenomenon 'above the thermocline 200 feet below the surface'. Plainly surface debris pushed by in this way against wind and wave might be misperceived as monsters. However, a sceptical Roland Watson has referred to 'the near mythical seiche effect', and it is true that photographic evidence of the phenomenon appears elusive.

The exposure of the events which led up to the Surgeon's photograph and, if the phenomenon really does exist, the discovery of the propulsion of floating objects by wave action inches below the surface, which may drive inanimate objects against the prevailing wind, are two very important contributions to the Loch Ness story, of much greater significance than refinements in understanding of sonar tracking or a study of the loch's fish stocks.

Television documentaries about Nessie continued to appear with great regularity. In 2014 Channel 5's series 'The Missing Evidence' included an hour-long episode about Loch Ness. It was standard fare and adopted a by-now conventional sceptical perspective, with an 'authoritative' voiceover which narrated the facts, framed by a dramatic thudding soundtrack and swooping aerial shots of the loch. A psychologist showed the limitations of eye-witness testimony, a statistician analysed the sightings record, a wave expert manufactured some surface water disturbance in a specialised water tank and an image analyst debunked the flipper photograph.

At this programme's heart was the top expert on the subject, 'naturalist and investigator Adrian Shine'. The decades-long Loch Ness story was compressed to a few shots of ancient 1930s newsreel footage. Evidently Rupert Gould, Constance Whyte, and Tim Dinsdale had never existed. Once again, the historical record was strangely altered to put a particular man of destiny centre stage:

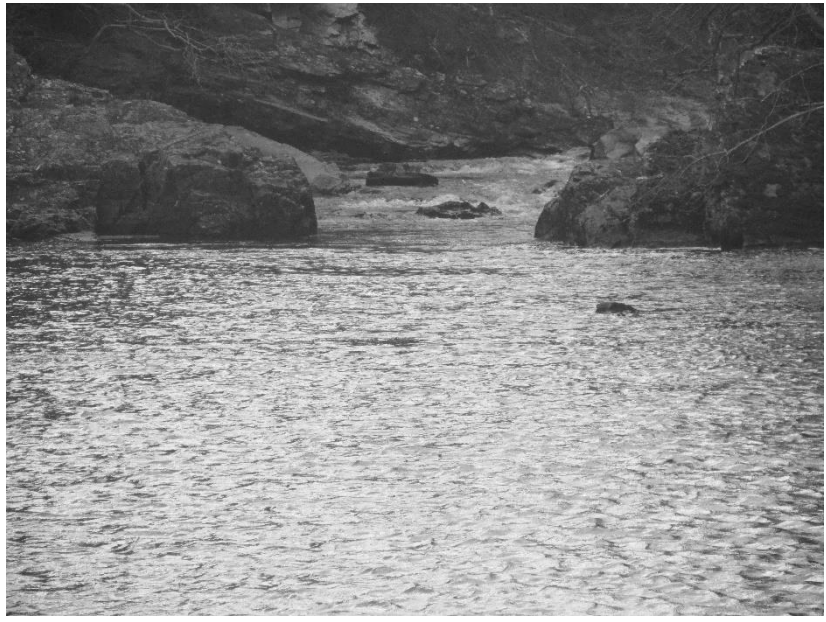
> As the [nineteen] seventies dawned investigators took the scientific quest for Nessie to a deeper level beneath the dark forbidding surface of the loch. Veteran Loch Ness investigator Adrian Shine was among them… Then finally in 1972 there appeared to be a breakthrough.

This version of Loch Ness history is, to put it mildly, misleading.

21. The ‘Witches stone’ at Loch Ness.

22. ‘Monster rock’ at Loch Morar.

23 and 24. ‘Monster’ rocks at Loch Morar.



25 and 26. Stoney Pool, Invermoriston, where a ‘huge creature’ some 30-40 feet long was sighted by a local man.

16

Monstrous

Write when there is something that you know; and not before.

Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932)

In September 2015 the leading commercial publisher Orion published *A Monstrous Commotion: The Mysteries of Loch Ness*. Gareth Williams's book re-told a familiar story, purporting to give both sides of the argument and, at the end, allowing the reader to make up her own mind.

Gareth Williams was an unlikely person to come out as a monster man. He was a recently retired academic – the former Dean of Medicine at the University of Bristol, with an impressive publications list behind him. He had been to Loch Ness just twice in his life – once as a child, and then a second time fifty years later to research his book. His medical background proved valuable in illuminating aspects of the Loch Ness story which had hitherto been in the shadows, including the later career of R. K. Wilson and the moment *Nature* unwisely embraced Scott and Rines's mediation of Nessie. Gareth Williams had also made a great discovery – buried away in an archive at the library of the University of Cambridge was a cache of correspondence about the hunt for the monster. Centred on Peter Scott, it involved all the leading figures from the great monster revival of the 1960s. A bright unflattering light was suddenly shone on all the jealousies, passions and manoeuvrings which lay behind that noble quest for Truth. As if those riches were not enough, Williams also promised 'a surprising conclusion'.

Sadly, the amazing twist at the end turned out to be a dud – a re-heating of the novelist D.G. Gerahty's ancient boast to Henry Bauer that

he invented the monster as a PR stunt for hoteliers. Williams insinuated that Alex Campbell was Gerahty's 'stooge' and part of the plot. But it showed a lack of understanding of Campbell's character to believe that he was someone else's puppet. Campbell's burning commitment to the water kelpie of the loch was a private obsession, not something stoked by a third party. Moreover, Professor Williams was plainly unaware that this flimsy conspiracy theory had been comprehensively debunked over twenty years earlier. Steuart Campbell had investigated and established that there was not a scrap of hard evidence to substantiate Gerahty's improbable boast.

Conspiracy theories about the origins of Nessie possess no credibility, because everything depended on a sequence of quite arbitrary events – the Mackay sighting, the Spicer sighting, the involvement of Rupert Gould, the Hugh Gray photograph. No strings were being pulled behind the scenes to connect these events. Nor could anyone possibly have foreseen how Alex Campbell's original news reports would gain the traction that they did.

When I first look at a new monster book my immediate action is to examine the index to see what the author might have to say about 'Binns, Ronald'. In the case of *A Monstrous Commotion* I was startled to discover that between 'Bibby, Sir Derek' and 'birds' there was only white paper. Professor Williams quite literally blanks out *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, utterly, except in the bibliography, where he manages to omit the name of my collaborator, R.J. Bell. I find this remarkable for two reasons.

Firstly, an account of the Loch Ness story which purports to cover events from the beginning to the second decade of the twenty-first century, ought to mention the sudden, unexpected appearance on Nessie's fiftieth birthday of the first sceptical book, produced by a collaboration between two disillusioned former members of the Loch Ness Investigation, with the assistance of a third former member. It ought to acknowledge how influential it was and how its arguments and conclusions are now shared by other former believers. Up until the moment of my book's publication the conventional narrative had never been challenged and belief in the monster was hegemonic – something which back then was readily identifiable in all the existing books in print, in the monster exhibition at Drumnadrochit and in TV documentaries of the period. After 1983 scepticism took a growing hold on Nessie culture

and one by one other believers went over to the dark side. Today a figure like Roland Watson perceives himself, correctly, as a member of a beleaguered minority, combating the new sceptical orthodoxy. To erase *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* from this cultural transformation, as Williams does, is very odd. If *More Than a Legend* was the most influential work of Monster advocacy ever published, so likewise *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* was the iconic work of scepticism.

Secondly, Professor Williams is plainly very much aware of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* because he reproduces its arguments and adopts some of its stylistic features. There are moments when the echoes are surprisingly strong. *A Monstrous Commotion* is not a polemic and Williams is even-handed in his account of evidence such as the Dinsdale film, where he gives equal coverage to both the boat and monster interpretations. But it is perfectly plain that the Professor believes that there is no unknown species of large animal resident in the loch. His conclusion that 'The "Loch Ness Monster"...is not a single entity, but a ragbag stuffed with non-monstrous animals, tricks of nature and hoaxes' reproduces the analysis of the ninth chapter of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*. This identified classic monster sightings as involving misperceived boats, ducks, boat wakes, geese, cormorants, tar barrels, floating tree trunks, windrows, salmon, sturgeon, poachers' floats, otters, deer, mergansers, divers, grebe and mirage-effects, concluding with the judgment that 'The sightings record is riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions... No single phenomenon can possibly account for the totality of fifty years of widely differing eye-witness reports from Loch Ness.'

As a chronological account of the Loch Ness story *A Monstrous Commotion* is curiously lopsided. The first 196 pages cover the period 1933-1978. Then, in just eight pages, Williams scampers through the years 1979-2000. After that, on page 206, he begins his conclusion, backtracking over the material covered earlier in the book. Williams misses out more or less everything to do with Loch Ness over the past quarter of a century, including photographs, movie film and books such as Roland Watson's *The Water Horses of Loch Ness*. There is no mention of that very well informed mainstream movie *Loch Ness*, let alone the intriguing footage shot in 2007 by Gordon Holmes. Before 1933, where monster reports are concerned, 'if we only accept contemporary reports, there is nothing', Williams argues. Roland Watson argues otherwise but

Williams simply ignores him. As far as the Professor is concerned, the Loch Ness story more or less ends with Project Urquhart in 1992. As an historical account, this is less than adequate.

Williams's most remarkable elision occurs in just two paragraphs, which leap from 1981 to 1984 and which are all about Adrian Shine's sonar work at the loch. The year 1983, the fiftieth anniversary of the monster, is not mentioned. Neither is the publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, which is simply erased from existence. The book's shattering impact on monster orthodoxy or, indeed, upon new arrivals such as Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar, receives not a whisper of a mention. The fury of Robert Rines and his consultation with a libel lawyer goes undescribed. Adrian Shines's angry response in *Cryptozoology* is passed over. The feelings of Tim Dinsdale and Nicholas Witchell regarding the book's treatment of them are not identified. As an account of the Loch Ness story Williams's version is curiously reminiscent of Soviet historiography in its dogged determination to airbrush the record and exclude certain aspects of what really happened. Professor Williams correctly identifies the publication of *More Than a Legend* as 'both a landmark and a turning point in the Monster's fortunes'. But the same holds true for *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, which marked the beginning of the end of the Nessie myth. This book was a work of heresy, written from inside the monster camp.

What is even more peculiar is Williams's evident determination to exclude the name 'Ronald Binns' from even a single mention. He generalises about 'the sceptics' assault on the photographic evidence' but the name Binns is never mentioned. Even when Professor Williams directly cites an argument made in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, he evidently cannot bear to acknowledge its source.

Once, long ago, sitting at the LNI camera station in the garden of Basil and Winifred Cary, I observed a trawler churning its way down the loch, flanked by two other trawlers just behind it (in flying duck formation). These three trawlers passed Urqhuart Castle, heading towards Fort Augustus. They were moving fast, leaving huge wakes. After they had gone out of sight I was struck by how much one of these immense, dark wakes resembled the Macnab photograph. In retrospect I wish I'd taken a photograph. That was the only time I ever saw three trawlers on the loch but at the time, as a believer, I was not interested in accumulating non-monster images. In any case I'd never been all that enthralled by the

Macnab picture. It lacked the magic and mystery of the Surgeon's photograph and Lachlan Stuart's three humps. I much preferred Peter O'Connor's haunting close-up monster to that strangely oversize beast of Urquhart bay.

In due course this memory became grist to the mill of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, where I wrote that what Macnab photographed 'could easily be a wave effect resulting from three trawlers travelling closely together up the loch'. This analysis is mentioned by Williams ('Other interpretations of the Macnab photograph include interfering bow-wakes from two or more trawlers that had passed out of sight beyond the Castle') but Williams's readers will search in vain for information as to whose theory this is, or where it was published.

Williams's determination to exclude all mention of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* is even more perplexing considering that he imitates its structure and content in a number of quite striking ways. My book demolished the monster tradition stretching back hundreds of years, argued that if there were monsters present in the loch their existence would have been recorded long before 1933, and went back to the files of the *Inverness Courier* to scrutinise afresh the origins of the mystery. The final chapter of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* noted the appeal of monsters to the human imagination and scrutinised its social and cultural history. *A Monstrous Commotion* does all these things without once acknowledging that this has all been done before, some thirty-two years previously, on Nessie's fiftieth birthday.

The Loch Ness Mystery Solved devoted a chapter to a critical scrutiny of Alex Campbell's role in discovering and promoting the notion of a monster in Loch Ness. It drew attention to a 1930 report in the *Northern Chronicle*, which seemed to be an earlier attempt to publicise strange sightings in the loch. I concluded, 'It now seems quite possible that Campbell was also responsible for the earlier 1930 news reports, and their style is very similar to his 1933 item.' Professor Williams does exactly the same, concluding that Campbell was probably responsible and noting 'similarities in the prose'.

My book ended with a Gaelic saying; Williams ends and begins his book with a Gaelic saying. My book contained illustrations of 'The Changing Monster' beginning with Gould's giant newt and ending with Peter Scott's *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*; Williams has an illustration of 'Stages in the evolution of the appearance of the Loch Ness Monster',

beginning with George Spicer's monster and ending with Peter Scott's *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*. My book argued that Loch Ness was a landscape made for a mystery: 'The landscape itself produces the appropriate atmosphere of mystery and expectation.' Williams's first chapter is entitled 'A landscape made for a mystery'.

Professor Williams comes very close to direct plagiarism in his account of wave effects at the loch. In *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* I wrote:

> Gould claimed that 'The presence of the vessel herself would, I imagine, very soon undeceive the most casual observer.' In fact on a calm sunny day standing waves can commonly be witnessed at Loch Ness, and it is easy enough for the vessel which produced them to be twenty minutes away up the loch, out of sight.'

Gareth Williams, misquoting Gould, writes:

> Gould patiently pointed out, 'The presence of a boat will instantly "undeceive" the most casual observer.' In fact, it is easy to be deceived by the Loch's indented shoreline. The bow-wave travels away from the boat's course at brisk walking pace and can take 20 minutes to reach shore from mid-Loch – by which time the boat responsible may be miles further on and out of sight.'

To rip me off like this, while at the same time airbrushing my book's existence from the record, is both impudent and intellectually dishonest. That Williams is a distinguished academic and author makes this all the more remarkable.

Since over thirty years had passed since publication of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, with no overt involvement on my part in the ongoing Loch Ness saga, perhaps Gareth Williams thought I was dead or simply wouldn't notice.

Well I'm not and I did.

*

Although it cannot entirely explain Williams's peculiar and extreme reluctance to acknowledge that my book ever existed, a part of the reason why *A Monstrous Commotion* wipes the name 'Ronald Binns' from the record is contained in the Acknowledgements. There, he pays tribute to

'the wisdom of several experts':

> Top of the list are a triumvirate who, between them, have a century and a quarter of inside knowledge – Dick Raynor, Adrian Shine and Nicholas Witchell. All three kindly read various drafts of the manuscript and corrected my many errors of fact, chronology and interpretation… Special mention goes to Dick…

The problem with this is that the Loch Ness story is a bitterly contested one. The voices of Raynor, Shine and Witchell represent only one version of the narrative. Collectively they now form an establishment which marginalises others who might reasonably claim some expertise on the subject or whose interpretations might differ from their own, whether those others are sceptics like Ronald Binns and Steuart Campbell or believers like Henry Bauer and Roland Watson. Sometimes, of course, as both the jealousies of Constance Whyte and the history between Maurice Burton and Tim Dinsdale illustrate, there may also be a hidden personal dimension lying behind an apparently detached account of the Loch Ness Monster.

In his 1989 revised edition of *The Loch Ness Story*, Witchell rewrote history, blanking out the existence of both *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* and Steuart Campbell's *The Loch Ness Monster: The Evidence*. At the same time he launched a personal attack on Campbell. As far as *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* is concerned, Nicholas Witchell of course had an obvious interest in blanking a book which demolished his beloved icons, resurrected his own long-forgotten 1972 monster sighting and ridiculed his gullibility about the Rines photographs, including his bizarre belief he could spot in one of them what he delicately referred to as Nessie's 'anal fold'.

In the case of Adrian Shine, he always demonstrated a very competitive desire to be identified as the first one to solve the mystery and to be regarded as the supreme authority on the topic. Dick Raynor, whose path crossed my own in the days of the LNI, has always had a much lower profile than the other two but today he is a leading sceptic whose website shuns all reference to the work of those who pioneered sceptical analysis at a time when he was still a devout believer. For example, his recent essay scrutinising the Torquil Macleod land sighting debunks this eye-witness account and concludes: 'Why has no-one

noticed the implausibly huge dimensions of the object in these sketches before?' That concluding rhetorical question is a remarkable one, since his analysis largely replicates without a scrap of acknowledgement the lengthy and illustrated deconstruction of the Macleod sighting in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*.

Gareth Williams has some sport with Tim Dinsdale, Roy Mackal and others who supply moments of inescapable comedy in the great Nessie saga. But he noticeably pulls his punches when it comes to those whom he relies on for assistance in interpreting the Loch Ness story. Peter Scott is treated with deference. Williams uses rather too many of Scott's wearisome sketches of his imagined monster but does not reproduce the entertaining photograph of the great naturalist and his wife proudly wearing customised T-shirts which proclaim in block capitals the stirring message I BELIEVE IN THE LOCH NESS MONSTER.

Nicholas Witchell receives a similarly respectful treatment. His work for soft porn magazine *Mayfair* is tactfully not mentioned. Williams asserts that 'The Monster never revealed itself to Witchell', which is of course not true, although it is understandable that his subject may not wish to be reminded of that reported sighting of a 'dark pole-like object about three feet in height' in August 1972. Witchell's career as a BBC TV journalist is not referenced, although he has been savaged by political commentators as an establishment toady and has been cruelly mocked (rather ungraciously) by Prince Charles, who famously remarked 'I can't bear that man. He's so awful, he really is.' As the BBC's fawning 'Royal Correspondent' he has even attracted the attention of that giant of our times, Jeremy Clarkson: 'I look at Nicholas Witchell on the news, endlessly commentating on Prince George's new hairstyle and how the Duchess of Cornwall smiled at an old lady and I think: "Is that how you wanted your life to turn out? Really?"' Journalists routinely refer to him as 'the BBC's sycophantic royal correspondent Nicholas Witchell'.

Similarly, Gareth Williams's account of Adrian Shine's involvement in the Loch Ness story is never less than deferential. It is the simple tale of a trajectory of scientific engagement which grows in authority. Missing from this narrative are Shine's remarkable somersaults regarding eye-witness evidence, fish stocks and sonar use. The low comedy of commercial adventure is tactfully omitted. Shine's botched attempt to profit from a nationwide travelling Nessie exhibition is never mentioned. At the first venue in Whitley Bay just ten people turned up. It was the

same story everywhere else. The tour climaxed in central London, where once again only a handful of visitors turned up. It was a fiasco. A similar attempt to establish a permanent Loch Ness Monster Exhibition in Edinburgh also flopped. Located on the Royal Mile, 'The 3D Loch Ness Experience' (later renamed 'Loch Ness Discovery') invited visitors to be 'dazzled by the awesome 3D effects!' as 'Adrian Shine, scientist and the foremost authority on Loch Ness, presents the whole story.' This 'stereo-video production' used 'video and graphics' supplied by Shine's second wife, Maralyn: 'The Loch Ness journey begins when you put on the stereo headset'.

Judging by the reviews, there was no shortage of disappointed visitors:

> The '3D film' itself looked like it was recorded over 20 years ago. Actually, there were better quality 3D films back in the days of the red and blue glasses! The content of the film was dry and lacked any interesting content other than purely stating facts and a little history. If it had have been any longer than 20 minutes we would probably have left or risked falling asleep! I am not exaggerating here … my eyelids were going.

> We left with the feeling that we had just been mugged for our money! Actually you could see from the looks on everyone else's face that they felt the same. There was no exhibition … nothing but a 20 minute film that you wouldn't bother to watch on YouTube!

Williams has no qualms about poking fun at others in the great Loch Ness saga, but Adrian Shine's misadventures are diplomatically airbrushed from the record, including what was possibly his most unfortunate commercial venture, involving a board game. This attracted the attention of the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper, which under the banner headline MR SHINE'S £120,000 NET LOSS MONSTER: LEGEND HUNTER CHASED FOR CASH AFTER DREAM COLLAPSES described how behind the media image of 'Adrian Shine, with his Captain Birds Eye beard and enthusiast's fervour' lay the story of his involvement with a company alleged to be in serious financial difficulty.

> The game 'Nessie Hunt' was dreamed up by freelance greaseproof paper salesman Mr Shine who has been fascinated by the legend of

the loch for the past 15 years.

At first it seemed Nessie would take 38-year-old Mr Shine and his wife Jane away from their dingy £15-a-week bedsit in Wimbledon. Only later did the dream of riches turn into a monstrous nightmare.

According to Tony Harmsworth, Shine obtained damages for defamation from the *Mail* for this news report. It would be interesting to know more about this episode, but Williams is silent about it.

Shine in due course surmounted such difficulties. Four years later avid stamp collectors could purchase a First Day Cover of commemorative postage stamps featuring dinosaur skeletons, 'personally signed by none other than veteran Nessie investigator Adrian Shine', alongside a blue-lettered frank that read *Carried aboard the research ship Ecos on Loch Ness in the search for Nessie and signed by the project leader Adrian Shine*.

Truly a collector's item…

At the start of the twenty-first century Adrian Shine's past as a monster hunter and entrepreneur had been long forgotten. By now based at Loch Ness, he combined charm and authority with the cultivated eccentricity of a spectacular beard to become the number one person that journalists, documentary film makers, research teams and authors like Gareth Williams approached for comment and advice. Often identified as a marine zoologist and a naturalist, Shine's status was cemented by his presumably lucrative appearance in a comic Toyota commercial advertising the strengths of the Tacoma pick-up truck, which is shown surviving a ferocious encounter with Nessie. (It is hard to imagine the old school of monster hunters like Tim Dinsdale ever participating in a stunt like that.)

In writing *A Monstrous Commotion*, Professor Williams spoke to the generals to find out how the battle went. He did not bother with those mutinous foot soldiers who might have told a rather different story. Nor did he enquire by what strange process Adrian Shine, who in 1985 haughtily dismissed the conclusions of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* as 'a little premature', ended up as the voice of scepticism.

Part Three:
The Columba Matrix

27. Columba’s Well, Invermoriston.

17

The River Beast

A dog howls from a roof.
Is it a wolf? Someone wants it to be.

John Ashbery, 'The Confronters' (1995)

The first recorded Loch Ness Monster sighting, as everyone knows, occurred in the sixth century A.D. and involved Saint Columba.

Adomnán of Iona's *Life of St Columba* describes how the saint encountered local people burying a man who'd been attacked and killed by a ferocious water beast in the River Ness. Columba instructed one of his companions to swim across to the other side. The beast then broke the surface and with a great roar rushed towards the swimmer. Columba made the sign of the cross and commanded the animal to depart, which it at once did, fleeing in terror at great speed.

There are at least three ways of interpreting this famous episode. The most popular one is to regard this as a true but possibly slightly distorted account of an encounter with an early specimen of the Loch Ness monster. Two aspects of this episode resemble modern sightings of the monster. The first is the animal's sensitivity to sound. The second is the monster's ability to swim at speed. It is not inconceivable that the monster should have been found in the river that connects Loch Ness to the sea.

Although in modern times the monster has never been known to attack people it could reasonably be argued that such evidence is lacking simply because very few people go swimming in Loch Ness, as the water is far too cold and forbidding. Tim Dinsdale warned of 'the potential danger faced by those who swim in waters inhabited by these animals,

which must be fish-eating carnivores', solemnly adding 'having seen one of them I would never bathe in the lake – and whenever possible try to warn others not to do so either'. Ted Holiday also cautioned against it: 'Very few people dare to swim in Loch Ness and I believe that anyone that does so over deep water runs a risk.' He added the chilling warning: 'If encountered on land, with no ready access to water, it could only be regarded as a highly-dangerous animal.' The mysterious disappearance of Winifred Hambro, a very fit woman who jumped from a burning motor boat in her underwear to swim the short distance to the shore, has always raised the remote but troubling possibility that she was snatched by a passing monster. It occurred in deep water on 28 August 1932, not far from 'The Horseshoe' – a striking landmark on the south shore, where Torquil Macleod claimed to have seen a gigantic animal.

A second interpretation also holds that St Columba's encounter with a river beast is basically an accurate account of something that really happened but that the ferocious water animal was not the Loch Ness Monster but rather an Atlantic walrus. By the end of the nineteenth century the walrus had been largely hunted to near-extinction but in the sixth century it would have been perfectly possible for walruses to travel up the River Ness.

One thousand years after Saint Columba walruses were still a source of wonder. Around 1600 Captain John Monck referred to them as 'sea horses' which were 'very strange creatures' with two hind legs 'being very unshapable'. Olaus Magnus luridly identified them as 'huge great fish as big as elephants', capable of 'sharp biting'. Worse still, 'if they see any man on the sea-shore, and can catch him, they come suddenly upon him, and rend him with their teeth, that they will kill him in a trice'. Walruses can remain underwater for up to half an hour, they communicate by loudly bellowing and snorting, and they can be aggressively and violently territorial – behaviour which neatly matches that of St Columba's unidentified river beast.

A third interpretation, which is the one I favoured when writing *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, is that this episode is completely fictitious. Adomnán is believed to have written his *Life of St Columba* during 696/697, a century after the saint's death. Columba was born around 521 and died in 597, so everything that Adomnán wrote was based, at best, on second-hand sources. He was not writing a biography in the modern sense of that word but rather, quite literally, a hagiography. Hagiography

is a genre which, by definition, is shaped by specific conventions of form and content. For example, the *Life* borrows material from other saints' lives and simply recycles it as if it had happened to Columba. Adomnán's biographical format was influenced by the representation of Italian saints in the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great. The *Life* is episodic in structure, shaped not by chronology but by theological theme. It is both realistic and utterly fantastic. Naturalistic details – real topography, real animals, real events – are mingled with angelic and demonic manifestations, magical occurrences and paranormal incidents, framed by the narrative's thudding insistence on Christianity's reiterated victories over every hostile entity, both naturalistic and metaphysical.

Adomnán wrote primarily for his community of monks on Iona. The account was written in Latin, which was effectively the private language of the religious establishment and certain cultured ruling elites (which did not include the Picts, who inhabited much of the Scottish Highlands). Adomnán's purpose was didactic: to celebrate and confirm to the monastery community of Iona their predecessor Columba's unimpeachable status as a saint. Barbara Yorke has suggested that behind the text lay an ecclesiastical agenda connected to contemporary church politics. She argues that the *Life* was written 'with the intention of protecting the reputation of the saint after the synod of Whitby of 664 when Wilfrid had intimated that he was a false prophet and at a time when Patrick and Brigit, the saints of rival monastic confederations in Ireland, were being actively promoted.'

The *Life* (which few who cite St Columba in connection with Nessie seem to have read) is divided into three Books. The first is a collection of stories which testify to Columba's ability to predict future events; the second provides examples of his miraculous powers; the third describes angelic apparitions associated with Columba.

The River Ness episode is contained in the second book. This section includes a number of miracles involving rivers: a miracle which occurred in the River Boyne, a different miracle which occurred in a river in Leinster, a miracle involving 'a great fish' in the River Shiel, and a miracle involving 'two salmon of very unusual size' in another river. The River Ness miracle is preceded by the saint's encounter with 'a boar of amazing size' on Skye. Columba uttered a loud command to the beast to stop and die. It promptly collapsed, 'killed by the power of his terrible word'. Later miracles involve 'a stag of amazing size' and 'a salmon of amazing size' in

the River Lochy. Saint Columba's encounter with the river beast was not, in this reading, grounded in a real event at all but was rather a commonplace plot device 'in which snakes, or serpents, or dragons – terrestrial or aquatic, with or without wings, silent or bellowing – figure as stock properties in every variety of resuscitation or repulsion miracle'.

Besides, if this episode from the *Life of St Columba* is to be read as literally as it has been by monster enthusiasts, one might ask why Adomnán's emphasis is on the River Ness water beast's *bellicosity*. If this was truly the monster, why does its size go unmentioned in a section of the text which repeatedly mentions the prodigious dimensions of the animals connected with Columba's miracles? The saint did perform a miracle on Loch Ness, but this involved the weather, not a monster. Also, the one episode in the *Life* which describes an encounter with unknown water creatures ('a source of terror…most fearsome, almost unendurable') takes place at sea, not in a loch. The monk Cormac and his crew encountered 'deadly loathsome little creatures…about the size of frogs, but exceedingly troublesome because they had spines' which surrounded the boat in a vast mass, threatening to break through its hull. It is hard to find a naturalistic explanation for this episode (jellyfish have been suggested, not very convincingly), so it is almost certainly fictitious.

Roland Watson, who believes that the river water beast episode from the saint's life did involve the Loch Ness monster, asks a pertinent question. Isn't it a stunning coincidence that Columba encountered a water beast in, of all places, the River Ness?

> Why did this story not happen on some other body of water named in Columba's travels such as Loch Awe or the river *Dobur Artbranani* of Skye or Lough Key, or the rivers Devlin, Sale and Fenda, not to mention the numerous unnamed waterways of the Western Scottish seaboard that the saint traversed on his missionary journeys?

It's a good question but it's one that has an equally good answer.

The *Life of St Columba* tells how the saint ventured deep into Pictland to visit the home of the pagan king Bridei, who occupied a fortress in or near the site of modern-day Inverness. Columba and his companions travelled to and from Iona via the Great Glen, evidently on foot and by boat.

Adomnán describes a number of miraculous episodes which occurred in the vicinity of the fort. One miracle occurred when the saint paid his first call on the Pictish leader: 'St Columba climbed the steep path to King Bridei's fortress' but the king refused to have the gates opened. Columba then made the sign of the cross and 'At once the bars were thrust back and the doors opened of themselves with all speed.' The king and his advisors were duly alarmed and impressed by this and welcomed Columba, henceforth treating him with great respect. On another occasion (rather contradicting the previous anecdote) Columba and his companions were saying vespers near the king's fort when Bridei's wizards tried to silence them. Columba responded by chanting the forty-fourth psalm 'and at that moment his voice was miraculously lifted up in the air like some terrible thunder, so that the king and his people were filled with unbearable fear'.

On another occasion, inside the king's fortress, Columba warned the king's wizard Broichan that if he did not release an Irish slave-girl then his life would be cut short. Broichan refused his request. The saint had made his plea in the king's hearing: 'Then leaving the house he came to the River Ness.' Plucking a white pebble from the river, he blessed it. Broichan promptly fell seriously ill. The pebble was delivered to the king, with a message about its curative power. The slave-girl was freed, the pebble was placed in water, where it miraculously floated, and when Broichan drank from this water he made an immediate recovery.

The location of King Bridei's fortress remains a matter for continuing speculation. From the *Life* we can glean that it was on high ground with a steep path leading up to its entrance and that it was near the River Ness, which runs for some six miles between Loch Ness and the Moray Firth. There are three possible sites which match Adomnán's description. The traditional favourite is Craig Phadrig, west of Inverness. This ancient vitrified fort had a spectacular view, including one of the River Ness, winding its way seaward some two miles to the south. Another possible location is a ridge encircled with ditches and ramparts located south-west of Inverness at Torvean (today sandwiched between the A82 and the Caledonian Canal). This directly overlooks the nearby River Ness. When the canal was being excavated below this ridge a solid silver chain was discovered, subsequently identified as the heaviest Pictish chain found in Scotland and assumed to be a badge of high status. A third

possibility, put forward in 1906 by Wentworth Huyshe, is a site in Inverness, east of the river, 'on the eminence called the "Crown," where tradition places its oldest castle' (today called Castle Hill). Some modern archaeologists favour this last location, asserting that 'its large size, dominating aspect rising about 25 m above the river, and command of the strategic lowest fording place on the Ness, all combine to make it eminently suitable to have been the principal stronghold of an important king'.

All three sites are closer to the Moray Firth than they are to Loch Ness, so if the river beast episode is rooted in an actual event it is likely to have occurred closer to the sea than to the loch (which, it could be argued, enhances the walrus explanation).

The important point about all these miracles performed by Columba is that they occurred in the very heart of the Pictish king's domain. The abbot's power was supreme, both inside the fort and outside. Time and time again the force of the Christian faith defeated the magic of the Pictish wizards. The answer to Roland Watson's question – why the River Ness? – is simple. The River Ness was special in a way that none of the other waterways he cites were. It was an ideologically charged waterway of enormous theological significance. In Adomnán's version of Scottish society even the river which ran by the Pictish king's fort was under Columba's control. The heathens were powerless. A river beast might kill a Pict but it could never kill a Christian.

At both Loch Ness and the River Ness, Columba held power over the natural world. The weather was under his control, and so were the beasts of land, river and sea. Miracles involving water were of particular significance because animism frequently informs pagan cultures, which regard rivers, lakes and wells with reverence and awe. In Book Two, Adomnán scathingly describes how when Columba journeyed in the land of the Picts he heard of a well that was worshipped as a dark god by the heathens, because contact with the water left people leprous, half blind or crippled. The saint duly invoked Christ's name and then he and his companions drank the water which he'd blessed. Not only did they suffer no ill effects but ever afterwards the well's properties were reversed: now it cured ailments instead of causing them.

In short, the miraculous power of Christianity overwhelmed every aspect of the Pictish religion. Where water was concerned, Columba drove the demons away from a well and quelled the rough waters of Loch

Ness by halting a storm conjured up by King Bridei's wizard Broichan. The River Ness water beast miracle, like the River Ness white pebble miracle, was designed to emphasize this simple point. The River Ness was not just one more Highland river but the waterway that ran alongside the very centre of Pictish power. And this, of course, is the message rammed home in the last sentence of the water beast episode:

> Even the heathen natives who were present at the time were so moved by the greatness of the miracle that they had witnessed that they too magnified the God of the Christians.

18

Modernity and the Absent Monster

'Before deciding that question I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog, for one true inference invariably suggests others.'

Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of Silver Blaze' (1892)

To understand how important St Columba's river beast is in the fabrication of a Loch Ness 'monster' requires consideration of the reproduction of Adomnán's *Life* in the nineteenth century, the forging of Scottish identity, the arrival of modernity in the Highlands, and the very special cultural representation of Saint Columba in the immediate Loch Ness area.

Interest in Adomnán's *Life* was very slow to develop. When Dr Johnson visited Iona he was unaware that this text existed at all. Some confused eighteenth century visitors even believed that the saint who had lived on the island was named Columbus. The first biography of Saint Columba to be written in English did not appear until 1798. Columba became a theologically contested figure, claimed by both Roman Catholic Ireland and Presbyterian Scotland. An additional twist was given by the rise of Romanticism, which valued ruins, graves and wild landscapes, and which fed 'a growing tendency in the early nineteenth century to see the Celtic peoples as in a peculiar sense individualistic, inspired, visionary'.

All this coincided with the opening-up of Scotland to English visitors.

In July 1803 the British Parliament appointed two commissions. Firstly, the commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges were charged with modernising the transport network by building a network of new roads. They were required to be of high quality and at least 12 feet wide. This grand scheme was intended to supplement or incorporate and modernise the older network of military roads. A report produced in 1804 included a map of this new road system. It included a new road which was to be constructed along the north shore of Loch Ness, running from Fort Augustus to Invermoriston, Drumnadrochit and Inverness. In the same area the old military road running west out of Invermoriston to Kyle of Lochalsh was in a neglected condition and it was decided that this should be upgraded and modernised. Work began at once and by 1812 no less than forty Highland road schemes had been completed. The result was, in the words of one historian, 'to provide the northern part of Scotland with something close to the main road network it has today'. Today's roads at Loch Ness are simply modern upgradings of these early nineteenth century highways: the A82 (between Fort Augustus and Inverness) and the A887 out of Invermoriston, which merges with the A87 to Kyle of Lochalsh.

The second commission was dedicated to the construction of a Caledonian Canal linking the east and west coasts of Scotland and running down the Great Glen between Inverness and Fort William. This had been first suggested by steam engineer James Watt in 1774. In 1801 the engineer Thomas Telford was asked to produce a report on Highland communications, which included ascertaining 'the practicability of forming a complete inland navigation from the Eastern to the Western Coast'. Telford found the route suggested by Watt to be viable and recommended this and other transport modernisations. They would, he argued, benefit the Highlands 'by the introduction of habits of Industry, and Capital in the Country'. Moreover, connecting the Irish Sea with the North Sea in this way offered strategic advantages to the Royal Navy in time of war. Work on this vastly ambitious project began in 1803.

Constance Whyte suggested that Loch Ness was only opened up to the modern world in 1933. In fact, modernity arrived in the early nineteenth century. If the loch was really inhabited by a species of huge water beast which from time to time surfaced, displaying a huge back, a series of humps or a neck some eight feet or more in height, this is the moment when multiple reports of sightings might have been expected to register

with the urban media. Inverness has been described as 'the epicentre of Telford's Highland exploits' and Thomas Telford knew Loch Ness and Fort Augustus well.

There were, of course, much earlier times when the presence of a large unknown species in the loch might have been expected to be noticed and recorded. As I pointed out in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, letters written from Urquhart Castle date back to the year 1297. The castle, sited in a commanding position beside the loch, remained occupied until the end of the seventeenth century.

On the other side of the loch, beyond Dores, stood a mansion which in 1626 was recorded as a building of three storeys with a round tower. It has remained in occupation ever since and is today known as Aldourie Castle. In the nineteenth century a new wing was added and the house was later refurbished in the popular Scottish Baronial style. It was from the grounds of Aldourie Castle that Greta Finlay had her close encounter with a Monster whose existence went unrecorded by those who lived in this property over a period of three centuries.

In 1726-7 General Wade blasted a new road along the lochside from Dores to Inverfarigaig, as part of a route which connected Inverness with Fort Augustus. The first military barracks in this latter location was built in 1718, on the site of a modern hotel, The Lovat. Part of the old fort can still be seen today in the hotel grounds. It was replaced by the fort which gave the village its modern name (quite deliberately erasing the old Gaelic name Kilcumein, meaning the cell or church of St Cumin, who was a successor to St Columba as Abbot of Iona). This new fort was built on the shore of Loch Ness, between the rivers Oich and Tarff. After the victory at Culloden it was reconstructed, with a garrison of some three hundred troops. Dr Johnson and James Boswell were entertained at the fort in 1773.

Early tourists like Johnson and Boswell were followed by a vast surge of visitors in the nineteenth century. One of those who accompanied Thomas Telford on a tour of duty was the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey. Southey, like that other Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, might have been expected to delight in stories of a monstrous creature of the loch but evidently none came to his attention. Had any done so we can be sure he would have recorded them; his biographer complains that Southey had a 'tendency to be fascinated with everything and anything' and had a 'commonplace book mentality'.

Telford gave Southey a guided tour of Loch Ness, showing him the sights. Southey mentions the road to Glen Urquhart and Glenmoriston 'on the north side of the Lake'. Telford told him that the River Moriston had a spectacular waterfall which was a tourist draw, attracting 'many English people, and some nobles among them'. Telford took Southey along the old military road beside the south shore. At Foyers the poet stood close to the spot where in the next century Tim Dinsdale would film his Monster. The view reminded him of the Lake District: 'rocks, fern, and heather upon the side of the green hills, the lake below, and on the opposite mountain, where the rain has laid it bare in streaks, there is the same red colouring as at Buttermere and Wasdale'. Across the loch from Foyers the exposed red granite is still distinctive today and, reflected on the loch surface, it may even have contributed to Dinsdale's perception of a boat as a monster with 'a curious *reddish brown* hue'.

Telford and Southey stayed at Fort Augustus. Here, Southey was very impressed by all the frenetic activity involved in the Canal construction. The two men walked down to where the River Oich flowed into Loch Ness. It was being dredged and taken over to form part of the canal, with the course of the river diverted into a new cut to the north. Southey was impressed by the dredging machine which, using 'an engine of tremendous power', could

> bring up gravel, or whatever comes in its way. The rubbish is emptied by the buckets as they revolve, upon a shoot, down which it slides into a boat; that boat they row some 50 or 60 yards out into the Lake – into 40 fathom water; and when the rubbish is let out by a trap door, the boat being suddenly lightened of its whole burthen, bounds up like a cork upon the water.

But though débris dumped in the loch in 1933 was popularly supposed to have disturbed the monster and brought it to the surface, none of the commotion and activity associated with the construction of the Caledonian Canal had any such effect.

The canal reaching as far as Loch Ness was opened to through traffic from the Moray Firth in 1818. That same year the guns and troops left the fort for the last time and 'The Canal-builders became the new centre of interest in the village. There were about two-hundred of them that season.' A steamboat now plied regularly between Inverness and Fort

Augustus. Modernity had arrived: 'Even in its unfinished state the Canal put Fort Augustus on the traveller's route and brought Inverness into closer contact with the western Lowlands.'

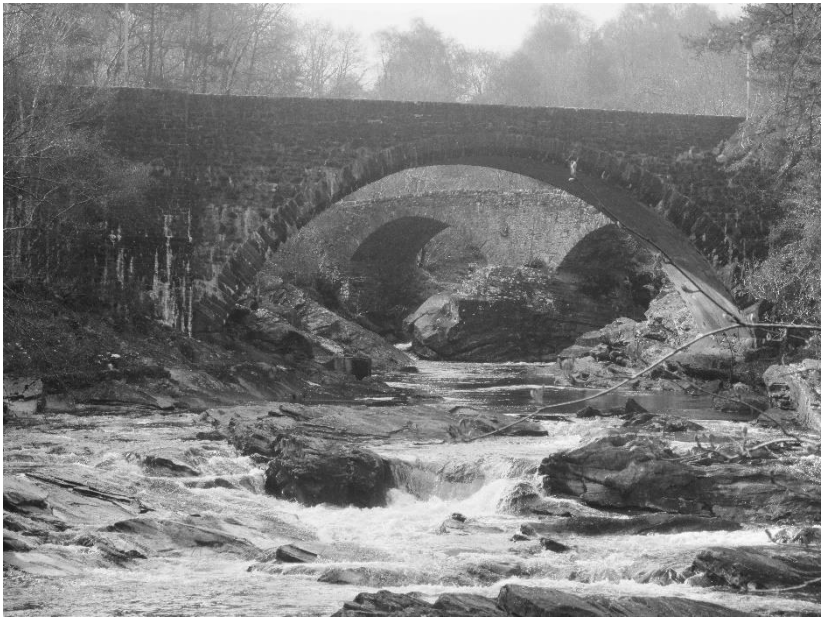
Constance Whyte believed that Loch Ness had been opened up to the outside world only in 1933 by a new motor road. Her strangely mythic version of Scottish history proved hugely influential. New Yorkers David and Yvonne Cooke turned up at Loch Ness in the 1960s, during the golden age of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau. They confidently reported back to their American readers the strong case for the Monster's existence, explaining 'Loch Ness was virtually unknown and cut off from the rest of the world until 1933.'

Ironically, Constance Whyte's knowledge of Scottish highways was out by over a century. The 1933 roadworks involved upgrading a road built as part of the Scottish transport network recommended and built by Thomas Telford at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Caledonian Canal formed part of that grand project. Its construction smoothed travel between Inverness and Glasgow in much the same way that the roads upgrade did one hundred and eleven years later.

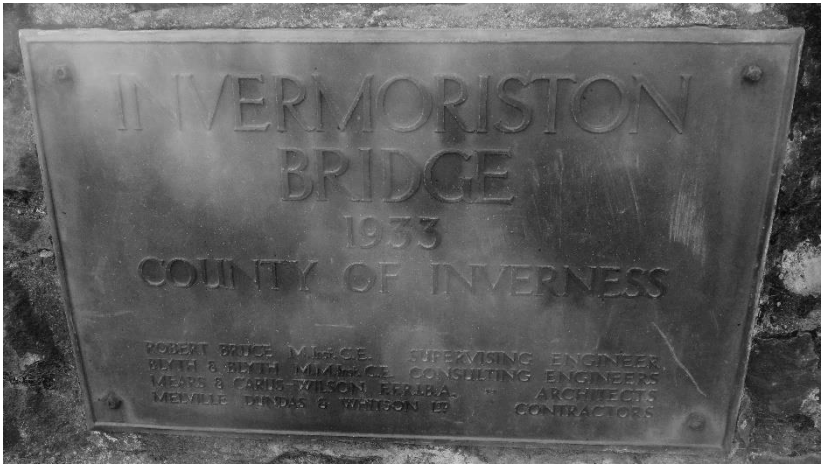
None of the vast workforce involved in designing, building or maintaining the Canal ever recorded seeing or hearing about a strange animal in Loch Ness. The Caledonian Canal finally opened from coast to coast in October 1822. Once built, a new wave of visitors took advantage of the canal route and for the people of Inverness the tourist rush 'overwhelmed their Inns and Lodging houses'.

In 1843 a three-year refurbishment project began, employing a workforce which amounted to some 1,500 by the next year. It included improvements at both the Fort Augustus end, where a new wharf was constructed, and to the east at Bona, where the canal entrance was widened. Small cast-iron lighthouses were erected. A new Admiralty chart of Loch Ness and other sections of the Canal were made available. Robert Southey noted that 'Loch Ness has been carefully sounded' and was duly impressed by its great depth.

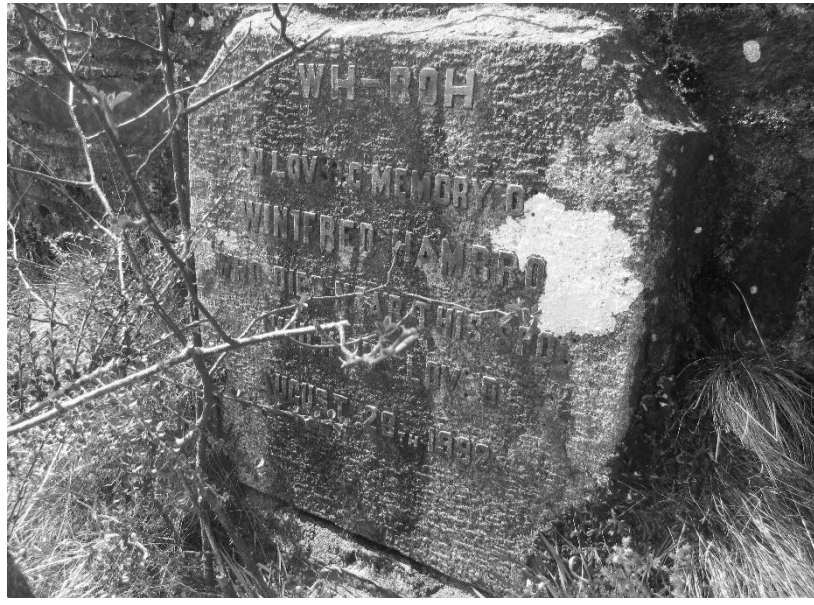
28 and 29. Remains of the 18th century road network at Loch Ness.



30 and 31. The 1933 road bridge at Invermoriston with the old nineteenth century bridge in the background.



32 and 33. The monument in memory of Winifred Hambro, who vanished on Loch Ness, 28 August 1932.



34 and 35. Not seeing monsters. Visitors at Urquhart Castle, a major tourist site beside Loch Ness.

19

The Invention of Scott-Land

Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!

Walter Scott, 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' (1805)

The arrival of modernity in the Highlands in the early nineteenth century in the form of new roads and the Caledonian Canal coincided with the growing success of a poet and novelist whose name (which could hardly have been more apt) was to become synonymous with Scottishness: Walter Scott.

Scott offered a romanticised version of the Highlands which was palatable both to the Scottish urban intelligentsia and to English readers. His early work *The Lady of the Lake* was a long poem which supplied heroics and romance in the Highlands, although the title tacitly acknowledged that its readership was not yet ready for that strange and exotic noun 'loch'.

To those who did not live there, particularly the English and urban Scots, the Highlands was a blank – a mysterious region which Scott imaginatively reinvented at the very moment that it was opened up to modern tourism. As Hugh Trevor-Roper has observed,

> The whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention. Before the later years of the seventeenth century, the Highlanders of Scotland did not form a distinct people. They were simply the overflow of Ireland.

Scott helped to create an image of Highlanders by combining romance with realism, initially basing his narratives on folk tales and legends. But the romanticism was never restrained by authenticity, no matter how 'real' Scott's tales purported to be. When his friend J. B. S. Morritt remarked that there was insufficient historical material upon which to base a projected poem, Scott replied, 'Then let us make one – nothing so easy to make as a tradition.'

But Walter Scott was not the first to construct an imaginary Scotland. Notoriously, James Macpherson began the nation's enthusiasm for bogus traditions with his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760). The publication date was significant. After the crushing of the Jacobite army at Culloden in 1746, the insurrectionary Highlanders were not simply repressed through violence, persecution and dispossession, they were also erased in their social identity and appearance. The Disarming Act banned the display of arms and the wearing of traditional clan dress:

> These symbols of Highland pride, however, were still legally endorsed by the English crown, but only for those who joined the British army. The Highland warrior was thus 'civilised' into the military equivalent of the economic position of the Lowland middle classes.

The Highlands became a space imaginatively reinvented on behalf of a culture which expressed Hanoverian hegemony. In the aftermath of Culloden the poet William Collins wrote about the water kelpie in 'An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as the Subject of Poetry'. This first recorded use of the word was produced in London, not Scotland, which Collins had never visited.

James Macpherson's invention of a Highland mythology went much further. His verse anthology purported to be an original collection of major Gaelic poems by a native bard named Ossian. Macpherson translated this ancient material into stirring English, conjuring up the Highlands as a place of romance and mystery:

> Dost thou not behold Malvina, a rock with its head of heath! Three aged pines bend from its face; green is the narrow plain at its feet; there the flower of the mountain grows, and shakes its white head in the breeze. The thistle is there alone, shedding its aged beard. Two

> stones, half sunk in the ground, show their heads of moss. The deer of the mountain avoids the place, for he beholds a dim ghost standing there.

Such was the success of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* that Macpherson managed to locate more material by Ossian, publishing *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem, in Six Books* (1762) and *Temora* (1763). Ossian was quickly established as Scotland's answer to Homer. The soft-centred verse struck a chord, with one admirer gushing:

> We find tenderness, and even delicacy of sentiment, greatly predominant over fierceness and barbarity. Our hearts are melted with the softest feelings, and at the same time elevated with the highest ideas of magnanimity, generosity, and true heroism.

But Ossian's poetry was fake. It was synthetic, concocted by its purported discoverer and translator. As Murray Pittock puts it:

> In these poems, partly reconstructed from Gaelic orally transmitted originals, partly composed of bridging passages and all veneered with a lugubrious nostalgia for a vanished era, Macpherson purported to present to the world a primary epic, brought to birth no doubt in defence of the culture of the supposed 'savages' of the 'Forty-five, which indicated to a European-wide readership the true cultural status of the Homeric and mysterious Highlands.

Macpherson was resisting modernity and the hegemony of Hanoverian rule by insisting on the cultural supremacy of Highland tradition. Like all successful hoaxers, he produced something which caught the temper of the time. There was a market which wanted the product which he supplied and which was emotionally and intellectually committed to faith in its authenticity. But because it was rooted in bogus classicism and the identity of a non-existent bard, Macpherson's invented oeuvre had the opposite effect to that which he intended. He erased Scottish history and replaced it with an imaginary one which, at the time, held a powerful emotional appeal. Others supplied verification. The Reverend John Macpherson (no direct relation), published *Critical dissertations on the origin, antiquities, language, government, manners, and religion, of*

the ancient Caledonians, their posterity the Picts and the British & Irish Scots (1768). This Macpherson was an amateur antiquarian and quite possibly a co-conspirator; his book was a stout defence of the Ossian texts, locating them in a bogus history.

These fake Scottish traditions gripped the popular imagination. The authoritative and informed views of sceptical antiquarians like Thomas Innes and John Pinkerton were marginalised as the process of manufacturing a colourful and utterly fake Highland identity gathered pace. In the wake of the fraudulent 'translation' of the writings of the non-existent Ossian came, in 1807, publication of the equally fraudulent 'original' Gaelic text. Though the literary productions of 'Ossian' were finally exposed as a fraud, this hardly seemed to matter. Other forms of ancient Highland identity were invented. The Allen brothers claimed to be in possession of a manuscript dating back to at least 1571, entitled *Vestiarium Scoticum* or *The Garde-robe of Scotland*. It depicted the clan tartans of Scottish families and purported to be the work of 'Sir Richard Urquhart'. Among their admirers was Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, author of *Legendary Tales of the Highlands* (1841) and a man, coincidentally, who was interested in water kelpie stories.

Walter Scott was deeply sceptical of the authenticity of Sir Richard Urquhart's manuscript, which, sure enough, the Allen brothers were unable to supply. Once Scott was dead, the brothers published it. Two years later, in 1844, they followed up with *The Costume of the Clans*, ostensibly a monumental work of scholarship but in reality 'shot through with pure fantasy and bare-faced forgery'. This became a much-quarried source for a rash of books about highland clans and their tartans. Ironically, this pseudo-nationalist iconography sprang up in parallel with another false tradition involving 'heroic portraits' of a great man. But 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' was a sentimental invention – the 'romantic figure who launched a thousand whisky bottles and shortbread tins' at Culloden revealed himself to be an inadequate and incompetent leader. He died 'a paranoid soak who failed to understand that his cause was lost'.

Out of falsified history, forged texts and lachrymose sentimentality, a powerful image of Scottish national identity was (the verb is apt) forged. Nothing could be more appropriate than that the Loch Ness Monster should join a national culture involving kilts, clan tartans, bagpipes and that romantic hero of the shortbread tins.

In time, genuine scholars noted all the inconsistencies in the Ossian oeuvre. Its sources were dodgy, there was no external evidence which would supply verification of Ossian's existence and, perhaps most damning of all, the texts contained anachronisms. These realities all found their ironic parallels in the Loch Ness saga, one hundred and seventy years later.

The unavoidable conclusion was that the three volumes of epic verse were fraudulent: 'the Scotland that Ossian supposedly inhabited never in truth existed. The poems were a "delicious delusion" and the epic history of Scotland "a Celtic dream".' But Macpherson shrugged off his critics. A Collected Edition was published in 1773 and for the rest of his life he was a rich and successful man. Also, like many hoaxers, he adamantly refused ever to confess that he had lied and faked. He went to his grave, comprehensively discredited by scholars but still stoutly insisting on the veracity of his Ossian inventions.

For the young Walter Scott, Macpherson's bogus Highland verse represented a problem: 'It was the most successful ever version of Scottishness, and it was a fake.' Scott set about constructing his own imaginary Scotland in verse. It was picturesque, romantic, patriotic and ostensibly rooted in tradition. As John Sutherland notes, 'Scott seems to have swallowed the propaganda of the Highland Societies, that the Celts were an indigenous Scottish race pushed north, not immigrants from the Irish west who had percolated south.' Long narrative poems like *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *The Lady of the Lake* were hugely popular.

This last work included a glancing reference to 'the river Demon', seen rising from the foam of a turbulent river. In a footnote Scott explained that by this he meant the 'River-horse', a Highland variant of 'the Kelpy of the Lowlands, an evil and malicious spirit, delighting to forebode and to witness calamity'. However, Scott was dismissive of such a creature, explaining that it was merely one of 'the numerous superstitions with which the minds of ordinary Highlanders are almost always imbued'. It belonged alongside other fantastic entities, such as a gigantic emaciated woman, the 'noon-tide hag', supposed to haunt the neighbourhood of Knoidart, and a goblin dressed in armour, with a bloody hand, seen in the forests of Glenmore and Rothiemurcus.

It was with his massively successful first novel, *Waverley*, that Scott truly caught the temper of the times. Its hero is an officer in the Hanoverian army. He defects to the Jacobite side, then returns to an

acceptance of the Hanoverian order. *Waverley* is a novel of compromise. The Jacobites represent the old feudal way of life, the Hanoverians embody modernity: 'It is Jacobite society, especially in the Highlands, that has to be explored and described; it is that which is *other* both to the hero and the reader.' By 1814 the Jacobite dream was smashed beyond repair and the Jacobite society could now be rendered sympathetically, romantically and sentimentally. Scott's diplomatic fusion of two antagonistic forces teetered on the edge of absurdity. Edward Waverley is a hero whose heroism on the battlefield is unidentifiably vague and riddled with contradictions – a man who is a friend to both sides. 'One of the most extraordinary aspects of Waverley's imbecility is that – as far as one can make out – he wanders through the battlefield offering as little danger to his foe as a dormouse in a tiger's cage,' sarcastically comments John Sutherland, adding: 'Had Scott not faded out the battlefield details, it would be very difficult to tolerate Waverley's surviving so comfortably.' But the inconsistencies of detail mattered less than the sentimental unification of Jacobite sympathy and Hanoverian order – the Union made flesh in a fictional text.

The real-life parallel to this fictional achievement was a major social event orchestrated by Scott. This was the infamous 'King's jaunt' of August 1822, when George IV made a ceremonial visit to Edinburgh lasting two weeks. This 'orgy of Celtification' was, in the words of Scott's biographer,

> a shameless parade of kilts, bagpipes, sporrans, claymores, and the panoply of Old Gael, all of dubious accuracy but picturesque enough to establish the image of Scotland in the non-Scottish mind for all time. He invented 'traditions' as freely as anything in the plots of his novels.

Walter Scott popularised the Highlands as a realm of grandeur and romance at the very moment that it was being made accessible to mass tourism through a modern transport network of roads and canals. The nineteenth century publisher Robert Cadell believed that 'Scott's Highland poem [*The Lady of the Lake*] – together with Telford's new road systems – was primarily responsible for turning northern Scotland into a mass tourist resort.' Indeed, the hero of *Waverley* 'is almost a literal tourist in Scotland, as well as a political tourist, with Jacobitism as

his “gap year” dalliance’. In short, ‘Scotland came increasingly to be identified at a variety of levels as an archetypal land of romance.’ As early as 1836 it was being asserted that ‘the whole of Scotland is Scott-land’.

Scott supplied momentum and acceleration to a nascent Scottish tourist industry which gathered pace as the century progressed. By 1866 over two thousand voyages were made along the complete length of the Caledonian Canal by sailing ships and steamships carrying passengers and cargo. But the railways also brought visitors to Inverness. Culloden became part of the tourist trail. An illustrated *Guide to Culloden Moor and Story of the Battle* was published in 1867 and was sold at railway stations across Scotland. Culloden remained a popular tourist destination for the rest of the nineteenth century.

Of course, the numbers involved were very much smaller than today, and visitors were largely affluent ones. Charles St. John may have raged against the arrival of ‘cockneys’ who, he grumbled, spoiled his fishing at Loch Ness, but in reality the working classes had neither the means nor the leisure time to venture north. Tourism in the Highlands was largely a middle-class and upper-class phenomenon. However, though the numbers were much smaller than today, these kinds of visitors were great recorders of their lives. They wrote letters, kept diaries and showed a keen interest in the places they visited. Travel literature proliferated, with books like Charles Richard Weld’s *Two Months in the Highlands, Orcadia, and Skye* (1860) providing a chatty record of a visit to an exotic land every bit as agreeable and interesting as any European holiday destination.

Weld was fascinated by local legends and superstitions and duly arrived in Inverness, which he found to be a thriving tourist town thanks to its ‘connection by railway, and the Caledonian Canal with the south, and above all its celebrity as a great sporting emporium’. He sailed along Loch Ness, finding himself among ‘a motley crowd of tourists’, who turned out to be members of ‘the British Association, who, in the form of male and female *dilettanti*, were digesting the severities of science amidst the beauties of nature, before returning to their southern homes’. It was a glorious day and the ship’s captain supplied a running commentary as they sailed down the loch: ‘he held forth periodically in true cicerone style as we steamed within view of remarkable localities’. But there was no mention of water kelpies or legends of a strange creature in the loch. The Loch Ness Monster had not yet been invented.

The big local tourist attraction at Loch Ness was Gordon Cumming: 'As soon as we were within sight of the Fort he made his appearance, arrayed in full Highland costume, followed by his servant and a grand-bearded goat.' Handbills for passengers informed them that there would be an hour-long delay at Fort Augustus as their ship passed through the locks, giving them ample time to inspect retired big-game hunter Cumming's display of stuffed animals. 'A large proportion of our passengers paid their shilling to see the lion hunter's really interesting collection.' Tourism thrived at Fort Augustus long before the Loch Ness Monster arrived on the scene.

Queen Victoria travelled along the Caledonian Canal in 1873, after spending a week with Lord Abinger at his home outside Fort William. On 16 September the royal party travelled by steamer to Loch Lochy, Loch Oich and then Loch Ness. In her Journal the Queen recorded how, while passing down Loch Ness, she 'Tried to sketch a little, but in vain, as the wind was so tiresomely high & in one's face.' The Royal Collection Trust describes it as 'A pen and ink over pencil drawing showing a view of Loch Ness from a steamer. The loch is shown in the foreground, with steeply rising hills on its banks.' The royal party disembarked at Dochgarroch and returned by coach to Balmoral.

After this royal endorsement a trip along the Canal became a fashionable tourist experience. Steamships competed to meet the demand; hotels thrived. The tourist trade boomed. The *Gondolier* and *Glengarry* provided a daily service along the Canal in both directions. The *Lochiel* and *Lochness* plied the route between Inverness and Fort Augustus, carrying mail and passengers and servicing the villages along the Loch. There were piers at Aldourie, Balmore (Abriachan), Urquhart Bay (Temple Pier), Inverfarigaig, Foyers, and Invermoriston. When Alex Campbell announced in 1933 that Loch Ness had 'for generations been credited with being the home of a fearsome-looking monster' it was Captain John Macdonald who pointed out that he had made some 20,000 trips on the loch over a period of half a century (i.e. since the early 1880s) and he had never heard of this supposedly legendary creature before. Nor, despite travelling up and down the loch on a steamer almost every day of the year, had he ever seen anything unusual on its surface.

Hotels and lodging houses sprang up to accommodate the surge of English visitors. The Lovat Arms at Fort Augustus is believed to date back

to 1869, when it was known simply as 'The Inn'. However, when the railway was built to Fort Augustus from Spean Bridge in 1903, the name changed to 'The Lovat Arms and Station Hotel'.

Other visitors were entertained by local hosts such as Bradley Martin and his wife Cornelia, wealthy New Yorkers who in 1884 leased Balmacaan House and its estate, on the edge of Drumnadrochit. This became their main home, where they spent most of the year. The couple employed some forty locals in the house and its extensive grounds and became popular with the local community for their philanthropy. Among other things they paid for the construction of a village hall, which opened in 1902. The Martins were socialites and their house guests included Grand Duke Michael of Russia. Bradley Martin was a member of the American Geographical Society and the American Museum of Natural History; tales of a strange creature in Loch Ness might perhaps have been expected to interest him but none evidently came to his attention or to that of his wife, who was a keen photographer. Bradley Martin died in 1913 and a large monument to his memory was placed prominently beside the road passing through the village, where it can still be seen today.

The Old Inn at Drumnadrochit, today reincarnated as The Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition, provided accommodation for tourists and those who came for the shooting. It was substantially refurbished in 1882.

Throughout this golden age of Victorian tourism no one recorded seeing or hearing about a large mystery animal in Loch Ness. It was only in 1933 that retrospective accounts began to appear. Rupert Gould quoted from a letter to the *Scotsman* (20 October 1933) in which the Duke of Portland described how, when in 1895 he became tenant of the salmon angling in Loch Oich and the River Garry, 'the forester, the hotel keeper and the fishing ghillies used often to talk about a "horrible great beastie" as they called it which appeared in Loch Ness'. But the Duke also added something which Gould chose to omit: 'None of them, however, claimed to have seen it themselves, but each one knew individuals who had actually done so.' Anecdotes like this would be more impressive had they been reported at the time, either in the press, which is always avid for sensation, or in a travel book, diary or correspondence. It may or may not be significant that the name of the 6th Duke of Portland (1857-1943) was William Cavendish-Bentinck and that he was distantly connected to Count Godard Adrian Bentinck (1887–1968). Count Bentinck was a

monster hunter who stayed at the Half-way House for a fortnight during three summers at Loch Ness. In August 1934 he was fortunate enough to get close enough to the monster to see it open its mouth: 'a kind of steam came forth, but was blown back by a slight cold breeze'. He saw the monster on seven occasions without, alas, obtaining a photograph.

In due course the Loch Ness Monster would be effortlessly absorbed into this picturesque but utterly fraudulent Highland tradition. *The Secret of the Loch* (1934), which was rushed out to cash in on the first wave of Nessie mania, is very much a Scott-ish movie. In the words of David Martin-Jones, 'although Scotland is depicted as a romantic wilderness in line with the myth of Tartanry, this wilderness is clearly identified as a middle-class, British (touristic) domain'.

Constance Whyte later supplied a much-amplified Scott-ish version of the Monster, complete with a romantically isolated lake, a bogus tradition, and fake photographs. The Monster itself is very much the child of Macpherson and Scott, a Highland survivor of epic dimensions which has endured to resist and taunt modernity.

Even in the twenty-first century Scotland is portrayed as a place elsewhere. In the film *Dog Soldiers* (2002), 'The location of the Highlands as an uncivilised, uninhabited wilderness is repeatedly stressed... Scotland appears to be a land divorced not only from civilisation, but also from history itself.'

At times it seems as if Scotland holds a magnetic attraction for inventors of fake traditions. One of the least known fraudsters in this regard was the distinguished twentieth century botanist John Heslop Harrison. Harrison believed that parts of the Hebrides had remained ice-free during the 1.7 million years of the last Ice Age. His theory received startling confirmation when he claimed to have discovered on the Isle of Rum a variety of rare plants. Some were entirely new to Britain, others were known only from very restricted locations on the mainland, and others had previously only been found in Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and the Channel Islands. No other British botanist had such astonishing good fortune in discovering rare plants at regular intervals. The suspicion that at least some of them had been brought from elsewhere and planted on Rum was later confirmed.

Heslop Harrison was also an entomologist. His research into the melanism of moths and the food preferences of sawfly larvae produced

results which, surprisingly, supported Lamarckism. But others failed to replicate those results and found alternative explanations for his observations. Heslop Harrison's entomological findings became as discredited as his botanical discoveries. It later transpired that he even lied about his address, claiming to live on The Avenue in Birtley when in fact his home was on the less-impressive-sounding Ruskin Road. But though accused of 'the most culpable dishonesty' as a botanist, Heslop Harrison never confessed to his multiple deceptions. Nor was anyone in the world of botany prepared openly to accuse him of fraud. Heslop Harrison was a Professor of Botany, a Doctor of Science and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He went to his grave with his reputation intact. Another thirty-two years elapsed before he was publicly exposed as a man who doctored evidence to support his dogmatic beliefs. That his career as a manipulator of evidence began in Scotland in the 1930s and ran parallel to the invention of the Loch Ness Monster is one of the minor ironies of the affair.

John Prebble acidly noted, 'Scotland sang its Jacobite songs for another hundred years.' But real history was elsewhere: 'Walter Scott's Celtification continued to seduce his countrymen, and thereby prepared them for political and industrial exploitation.'

This is a point echoed by George Monbiot who, having asserted that 'there isn't, and can't possibly be, a Loch Ness monster', critically scrutinised the phenomenon of the Highland tourist trade. Nessie forms part of a coach tour itinerary which includes Glencoe and Loch Lomond:

> There might be a gory painting of the Glencoe massacre on the shortbread tins, but that is as close as the occupants will get to the Scotland of reality rather than the Scotland of their dreams.
>
> You might object that these fantasies are harmless, that local myths simply provide a bit of fun for the tourists and a bit of money for the hosts. But it's the exoticisation of the other, the apprehension that the rest of the world conforms to different laws, that surely lies at the root of our age-old failure to understand the impacts – economic, political and ecological – that our activities exert upon other places.
>
> The more we extol the exotic and deny the real, the more we breed reptiles in the mind.

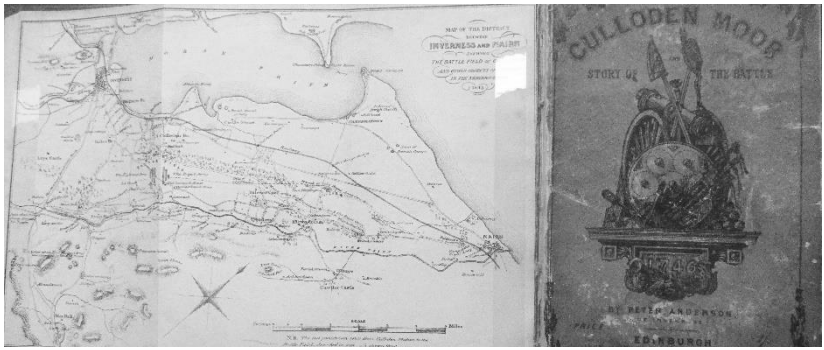
James Macpherson's invention of a Highland mythology, erasing Scottish social history and substituting an imaginary one which held a powerful emotional appeal, was replicated by Constance Whyte. *More Than a Legend* was a title which reversed the historical reality. The Loch Ness Monster was in truth *less than a legend*, amounting to nothing more than the twentieth century fabrication of a village enthusiast named Alex Campbell. It was a refutation of the modernity which had continued to arrive at Loch Ness in other ways than canals and railways: a nineteenth century factory manufacturing pottery at Dores; the opening, in 1896, of an aluminium factory at Foyers; the shattering impact of a major highway improvement project along the northern side of the loch.

At times the two parallel traditions of bogus Highland texts and a fictitious monster meet. Karl Shuker asserts that 'The most famous lesser Nessie is Morag, the monster of Loch Morar, whose history, like Nessie's, dates back many centuries, as testified by a very old Scottish song.'

> Morag, Harbinger of Death,
> Giant swimmer in deep-green Morar,
> The loch that has no bottom…
> There it is that Morag the monster lives.

As I pointed out thirty-six years ago, there is not a scrap of evidence that this 'very old Scottish song' ever existed outside the fertile imagination of a leg-puller. It first appeared as the epigraph to a monster book whose author explained she'd received the verse from an unidentified journalist.

The Loch Ness Monster story emptied the Great Glen of its actual social history and replaced it with a narrative of marvellous and magical encounters. That the first of those encounters was subsequently claimed to have been made by a saint only deepens the mythic intensity of the tale. But just as scholarship exposed the hollowness of Macpherson's 'Ossian' and the attached history, so the Loch Ness Monster has been unable to evade the exposure of its imaginary foundations. Today, belief in its existence requires the same burning faith which is attached to all lost and hopeless causes.



36 and 37. Tourism then and now. 1874 guide to Culloden, with battlefield map. Below: a sign at Invermoriston. Loch Ness.

38. The grave of Alex Campbell (centre), Strathoich Cemetery.

20

The Monster of 1857

Among the buildings-out of religion which the mind spontaneously indulges in, the aesthetic motive must never be forgotten.

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)

Interest in Saint Columba and in the biographical account supplied by Adomnán's *Life* was given a tremendous boost in 1857 when William Reeves (1815-1892) published the original Latin text, in an authoritative, copiously annotated scholarly edition.

This monumental work was published in a new edition in 1874, with the addition of an English translation. Another edition followed in 1895. Reeves's example inspired rival publishers to bring out their own editions of the *Life*, which appeared in 1860, 1894 and 1906.

Reeves translated the title of the dramatic River Ness episode as 'How an Aquatic Monster was driven off by virtue of the blessed man's prayer'. The neutral term 'Aquatilis bestia' ('water beast') was imaginatively enlarged, becoming instead 'aquatic monster'. This authoritative edition had a huge influence on later translators and from now on the beast of the River Ness was always described as a *monste*r. Wentworth Huyshe, whose edition of the *Life* appeared in 1906, translated this title as 'Concerning the repulse of a certain aquatic monster by virtue of the blessed man's prayer'.

During this period the word 'monster' was coming into use in quite another context. In the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts in 1836 a geologist, Edward Hitchcock, discovered fossilised tracks of a three-toed creature. They were dinosaur tracks and he was inspired to write a

philosophical poem about extinction

> Yet of the monster every vestige else
> Has vanished

He dreamed of the creature being revived:

> Oh for a sorceress nigh, to call thee up
> From thy deep sandstone grave

The dinosaur duly revives for a one-to-one conversation but decides it doesn't like the modern world or the quarrelsome species which now rules it. It returns joyfully to its extinct state:

> Strangely, and suddenly the monster sank,
> Earth op'ed and closed her jaws, and all was still.

Just six years before William Reeves published his hugely influential edition of Adomnán's *Life*, the first 'Jurassic Park' was built at Crystal Palace in south-east London, following the Great Exhibition of 1851. The sculptor Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins was commissioned to create more than thirty life-sized models of dinosaurs, which were cast in concrete and placed in the park around the glass exhibition hall after its move from Hyde Park. Most of the dinosaurs are still there today. Although the idea that dinosaurs might have survived into the modern age engaged the interest of popular novelists, it was shunned by scholars and scientists. No one at this time connected the plesiosaurus with the creature that St Columba had encountered.

Reeves regarded the *Aquatilis bestia* as merely a stock property derived from the Irish background of the Iona community: 'The belief that certain rivers and lakes were haunted by serpents of a demoniacal and terrible character was current among the Irish at a very remote period, and still prevails in many parts of Ireland.' But Saints had no problems in combating them, and Reeves cites examples from the lives of Saint Mochus of Balla, Saint Molus and Saint Colman of Dromore.

Wentworth Huyshe also relates the *Aquatilis bestia* to Irish tradition:

> Mr. W. R. Le Fanu, in *Seventy Years of Irish Life*, says: 'The dreadful beast, the wurrum – half fish, half dragon – still survives in many a mountain lake – seldom seen, indeed, but often heard. Near our fishing quarters in Kerry there are two such lakes, one the beautiful little lake at the head of the Blackwater River called Lough Brin, from Brin, or Bran as he is now called, the direful wurrum which inhabits it. The man who minds the boat there speaks with awe of Bran; he tells me he has never seen him, and hopes he never may, but has often heard him roaring on a stormy night. On being questioned as to what the noise was like, he said it was 'like the roaring of a young bull.' . . . Some miles further on, between Lough Brin and Glencar, there is another lake, from which a boy, while bathing, was driven and chased by the dreadful wurrum, which dwells in it. It bit him on the back, and hunted him all the way home, where he arrived naked and bleeding.'

The association of the Loch Ness Monster with Irish lough monster traditions risks the argument that collectively they add up to 'mere carryovers of Celtic myths'. The hunt for Irish monsters in the 1970s was damaging to belief:

> The tales from Ireland in particular stretch the hardiest believer's credulity to the utmost. Nessie's reputation cannot have been enhanced when some of the hunters sought similar creatures in Irish waters barely large enough to make a bathtub for Nessie…

But though indignant about the damage done to the credibility of the Loch Ness Monster, Henry H. Bauer, like all true believers, cannot quite let go of even the remotest possibility. He adds that, where tiny Irish loughs are concerned, 'the search was not entirely fantastic, given the hypothesis that Nessies are marine creatures that occasionally visit these readily accessible loughs'. The sceptic might well retort that to regard the loughs in question as 'readily accessible' smoothes out some rather large difficulties related to geography and topography.

The surge of interest in Columba resulted in such books as Lucy Menzies's impressionistic *Saint Columba of Iona* (1920), which was plainly pitched at a popular readership. Menzies, who had a patriotic nationalist agenda, hailed Columba as 'the founder of the Scottish nation

as well as of the Scottish Church' and asserted that 'the story of his battles, his voyages, his conquests, and his life at Iona, forms one of the most romantic pages of history'. Columba's life was played out in 'the very home of romance', i.e. 'The Highlands of Scotland with their rugged grandeur'.

In his magisterial edition of the *Life*, William Reeves at one point ambiguously located the King's fort 'near the north-east end of Loch Ness'. This was duly misinterpreted by Lucy Menzies, who in her account of Columba's visit to Pictland, informs her readers that 'After many days travel the Saints arrived at the castle of King Brude on the shores of Loch Ness.'

There are only two castles on the shores of Loch Ness – Aldourie Castle, which is a seventeenth century manor house later refurbished in the Victorian baronial style, and Urquhart Castle. An archaeological excavation at this last site concluded that 'there is good evidence for a stone-walled fort, standing as a citadel on the dominant rock boss at the southern end of the Urquhart promontory' and that 'the occupation began in the sixth century or later and ended, after a destructive fire, in the ninth century'. However, even if a fort existed here in Columba's lifetime (which is not certain) no one believes that this was the home of the Pictish leader, Bridei. The location doesn't match the description given by Adomnán. It is just possible that such a fort might have been the home of the 'old man called Emchath' and his son Virolec, who were both converted by Columba and baptised, together with Virolec's 'whole household'. However, Adomnán simply describes how Columba encountered Emchath in 'the fields of Glen Urquhart' (rather than beside Loch Ness) so any connection with the castle site is at best tenuous.

What is significant, however, is that *the Columba story was now being connected with Loch Ness in ways that went beyond anything that Adomnán recorded*. Reeves also linked river and loch etymologically, noting Adomnán's description of the loch as 'Nisae fluminis lacum' – 'the lake of the River Ness'. He concluded: 'It appears from this that the river gave the name of Ness to the Loch.' The two stretches of water were, at the level of language, indivisible, and they were also geographically linked. Essentially, then, they were indivisible: 'the two bodies of water were regarded as one and the same entity… a water complex that stretched from what is now Inverness to Fort Augustus'.

In *More Than a Legend* Constance Whyte wilfully misleads her readers by twice conflating the river and the loch. Firstly, she states that 'The story tells how the saint encountered some strange animal in the water of *Nesa* – the old name for Loch Ness.' This prefaces a translation attributed to Reeves which begins: 'At another time when the blessed man was sojourning for some days in the province of the Picts he was obliged to cross the water of Nesa…' But though she attributes this translation to 'Dr. Reeves' version', his one actually runs as follows: 'On another occasion also, when the blessed man was living for some days in the province of the Picts, he was obliged to cross the river Nesa (the Ness).' Mrs Whyte supplied no details of which edition she was quoting from, so it is impossible to tell if she was using a defective translation or imaginatively adapting it.

Well before 1933, then, the Saint Columba story, increasingly co-opted by numerous interests for diverse theological, nationalist and cultural purposes, was also being connected to Loch Ness through various elements which included a river monster, an Irish tradition of river and lake 'serpents', a variant Irish tradition of a 'wurrum – half fish, half dragon' which, excitingly, 'still survives in many a mountain lake' as well as that very striking local landmark, Urquhart Castle. A further ingredient to this mix was added by Lucy Menzies, who remarked of Columba's pagan adversaries, 'The belief in demons, phantoms, waterkelpies and waterbulls common to all northern religions was strong in the Picts who believed their country to be peopled by myriads of spirits both good and evil.'

These connections were loose, unfocussed and, at the time, not of any obvious significance. No one had yet joined any dots to create a recognisable pattern, yet some of the ingredients of a modern myth were plainly there, quietly fermenting, but not yet fully brewed.

Significantly, the link between Saint Columba and Loch Ness was powerfully reinforced at the loch itself.

With Scotland pacified and incorporated into Great Britain, there was no further use for a fort at the western end of Loch Ness. The building and its land were sold to Lord Lovat in 1867, who donated the building and its environs to the Benedictine Order of monks. An abbey was built on the site, incorporating part of the old structure of the fort. Like the earlier military structure, it had a spectacular view of the loch. But no

record survives of anyone ever reporting seeing a strange creature in the loch before the invention of the Monster in 1933. After that date the monks became Monster enthusiasts, supplying one of the earliest tourist guides as well as a string of witnesses.

Around Loch Ness there are various sites associated with the saint in one way or another. On the lochside at Abriachan, in what today are the grounds of Abriachan Garden Nursery, can be found 'St Columba's Font'. This is a mysterious hole six inches in diameter and around eleven inches deep, which has been bored into a block of hard mica-schist. It is surrounded by large, irregularly shaped boulders (possibly constructed as a circle) and next to it there is an enigmatic hollow curved incision. Its origins and purpose remain unknown but local tradition connects it to Columba and the water which collects in the hole has been used for baptisms, medicinal purposes and is supposed to benefit women in childbirth.

Further along the north shore lies Invermoriston: 'Saint Columba who brought Christianity to Scotland in the 6th century AD is closely associated with the village.' Reeves noted that 'About two hundred yards from Loch Ness is a burying-ground called *St. Columba's*.' Today located just south of the A82, it is associated with the site of an old church known as 'Clachan Cholumchille' ('Columba' s Church'). Nearby, at the roadside, is 'Fuara Cholumchille' ('Columba's Well'), the water from which was traditionally celebrated for its healing properties. Beside the well there was once a plain stone slab (now vanished) which, according to one account, was set up by the saint after he had blessed the well. The history of these sites is obscure and the connection with Saint Columba's passage along the Great Glen in the sixth century remains entirely speculative. This has not deterred tourist websites from drawing on local folklore to state confidently that 'This ancient well was blessed by St Columba on his travels to visit King Brude near Inverness in AD 565.'

Adomnán describes how, when Columba left the Pictish king and was about to set sail for home on 'the long loch at the head of the River Ness', the wizard Broichan conjured up a storm. The saint then called upon Christ for help and at once the adverse weather was quelled, so that all day Columba and his companions 'enjoyed a gentle following breeze for their journey, and the boat arrived at its intended destination'. In his edition of the *Life*, Wentworth Huyshe added a note for the benefit of readers ignorant of local geography, explaining that this destination was

'The southern end of Loch Ness, where now stands St. Benedict's Abbey, Fort Augustus.'

The association between Fort Augustus and St Columba is, as far as ecclesiastical history is concerned, historically accurate, and it was energetically promoted by St Benedict's, the Catholic monastery constructed on the site of the old military fort which gives the settlement its modern name. St Andrew's Chapel in the Abbey Church included a stained glass window portraying Columba, and to this day a prominent statue of the saint looks down from the one-hundred-feet high clock tower of the school, which opened in 1878. Indeed, this larger-than-life image of St Columba may ultimately have been the most powerful local trigger for bringing an imaginary creature to life.

St Benedict's had its own press and small publishing business, and in 1900 it issued a guide to the region which emphasised these theologically vital associations:

> The spot was familiar to St Columba and the early Celtic missionaries who followed in his wake, and they seem to have made it their headquarters when passing from Iona to evangelise the east coast. They have left their mark deeply impressed upon the district, and their memory still survives in a rich crop of place-names, churches, wells, hills, cemeteries and 'tilleadhs.' The Gaelic name Cille-Chumein which the village of Fort-Augustus has borne for thirteen hundred years, and by which alone it is still known to the Gaelic-speaking population, is derived from Cummein, a successor of St Columba in the abbatial dignity at Iona. The site of the church he built, his burying-ground, the hill from which he preached, and the mountain of his 'tilleadh' or return, all still exist in the neighbourhood.
>
> A most interesting relic of St. Cummin in the shape of an ancient Celtic bell long survived after the chapel built by him had perished. It was unfortunately lost through the superstition of some members of the Fraser clan.
>
> In A.D. 1559, the Dowager Lady Lovat, whose son and husband had been slain shortly before in the 'Battle of the Shirts,' made a pilgrimage to the battlefield along with some of her retainers. On the return through Cille-Chumein they took the ancient chapel bell intending to place it in their own church in Glen Conventh near Beauly. Passing down Loch Ness a sudden storm arose and the boat

> was in danger of being swamped. The intelligent oarsmen recommended that the bell should be sacrificed as a peace-offering to the spirit of the lake. Accordingly it was consigned to the waves, and in spite of this act of vandalism the boat safely won its way to shore. 'From that time,' as the chronicler says, 'the water below where the bell was cast became medicinal. Superstitious people call it wine, and send it from a great distance to their cattle when they are sick.'

'Cill Chuimein', the Gaelic name for the town we now know as Fort Augustus, literally means 'Cumméne's Church'. To the south of modern-day Fort Augustus lies Kilcumein Cemetery on the western side of a loop of the River Tarff. This is believed to mark the site of the original foundation of St. Cumein and of an ancient chapel.

Cumein – nowadays referred to by scholars as Cumméne the White – was the seventh abbot of Iona, the nephew of Ségéne, the fifth abbot, and the great-nephew of the third abbot, Lasrén. Cumméne the White is known to have written a book about Columba, of which no copies are known to survive. It is sometimes referred to as the first Life of Columba, though strictly speaking it appears to have consisted of written testimonies of Columba's miraculous powers. Adomnán drew upon this lost manuscript in compiling his *Life* of Columba, but the extent to which it supplied his source material is not known. However, since Cumméne the White's material evidently contributed to the second part of Adomnán *Life*, it is quite possible that he was the first recorder of the River Ness water beast episode.

Whether or not Cumméne ever followed in Columba's footsteps and ventured into Pictland is unknown. It is perfectly feasible that he visited the settlement which we now know as Fort Augustus and personally established a place of worship there on land to the south of the modern town. Alternatively, Cumméne's church may simply have been built by Christian missionaries from Iona who had their own private reasons for wishing to honour this particular distinguished abbot and saint from their community. All we are left with are tantalising indications that Fort Augustus held powerful associations with Cumméne the White, who contributed material to Adomnán's *Life of St Columba*. These include Suidhe Chuimein ('Cumméne's Seat'), a high mountain ridge some five miles east of Fort Augustus, beside the B 862 to Whitebridge.

What all this adds up to, I would argue, is what I would call *the Columba matrix*. St Columba was powerfully reproduced at Loch Ness as a major religious, cultural and historical figure. A variety of writers and folklore traditions associated him with the loch and its environs. From 1857 onwards, interest in Adomnán's *Life* was accelerated by an influential edition which for the first time associated the saint with an 'aquatic monster'. The location of the sighting – somewhere in the River Ness – was easily conflated with what Adomnán described as 'the lake of the River Ness'. And this aquatic monster, initially associated with an Irish lake and river tradition of hideous serpents and wurrums 'half fish, half dragon', was relocated in a supposed Scottish Pictish tradition which included belief in water kelpies and water bulls.

All this had happened long before 2 May 1933, when an unidentified 'Correspondent' broke the news to readers of the *Inverness Courier* that 'Loch Ness has for generations been credited with being the home of a fearsome-looking monster.' The anonymous writer was, famously, Alex Campbell. Did Campbell get the word 'monster' from knowledge of Columba's encounter with the monster of the River Ness? It's now impossible to know. But the question of who in 1933 first made the connection between Nessie and Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* is an interesting one. That it was Campbell there seems little doubt. His seminal news report of the Monster's existence appeared on 2 May 1933 and before the month was over the connection had been made. The headline A RIVER NESS APPEARANCE appeared in the *Inverness Courier* on 30 May 1933.

> In view of the interest aroused by the elusive 'monster' in Loch Ness, a correspondent writes that it may be mentioned that even the River Ness (in by-gone times) was not immune from the presence of some such beast, for in Adamnan's Life of St Columba, as edited and translated by J. T. Fowler, there appears the following (Chapter xxvii).

There followed the relevant extract from Adomnán's text.

The unidentified 'correspondent' can surely only have been Campbell, once again losing no opportunity to promote interest in a Loch Ness Monster from behind a cloak of anonymity. The timing of this *Courier* piece is important because at this moment in the Loch Ness story there was the danger of the monster fading from view and vanishing back into

obscurity. Captain John Macdonald's retort on 12 May to Campbell's story had been crushing and authoritative. A fortnight later the *Courier* effectively dismissed its own story, suggesting that whatever eye-witnesses had seen, the phenomenon was a natural one, not a gigantic unknown animal. By bringing the St Columba episode to public attention Campbell was plainly seeking to restore the credibility of the Monster and to justify his ficitious claim that there was a tradition which went back 'for generations'.

The text used in this newspaper article was from the Clarendon Press edition of 1894. This was a cheap edition retailing at eight shillings and sixpence, and it was marketed as being 'principally for the use of junior students in our Universities and elsewhere'. Reviewers noted the growing interest in the saint at the end of the nineteenth century:

> The new *Life of St. Columba* is indeed quite a first-class specimen of historical scholarship in its very newest development, and its appearance is a not less characteristic sign of the times than the selection of Adamnan as one of the books to be studied for the final Theological Honour School at Oxford in the current year, as it has been for many years for the B.D. Examination at Durham.

The Catholic *Tablet* was full of praise for this new and accessible annotated edition with a useful and illuminating introduction to early church history. *Freeman's Journal*, however, like an irascible Loch Ness Monster blogger, snarled that J. T. Fowler's account of the context of Columba's life in church history was 'a mere réchauffé of the controversial literature of the subject', characterised by attempts to prove that St Patrick was a Protestant. Fowler's attempts at iconoclasm were, the journal asserted, far from profound. The complaint is interesting as an example of theological anxiety. Adomnán's text could be claimed and appropriated by both Catholic and Protestant writers. Alex Campbell's achievement was to adapt it for a different kind of tradition, which revived Scottish folklore and resisted modernity by asserting a divinely sanctioned native prodigy which had long outwitted English colonisation and the industrial revolution.

Fowler followed Reeves in translating 'bestia' as 'monster' rather than 'beast'. But whereas Reeves had titled the River Ness episode as 'How an Aquatic Monster was driven off by virtue of the blessed man's prayer',

Fowler turned aquatilis bestia' ('water beast') into 'a certain water monster':

> OF THE DRIVING AWAY OF A CERTAIN WATER MONSTER BY THE VIRTUE OF THE PRAYER OF THE BLESSED MAN.
>
> At another time again, when the blessed man was staying for some days in the province of the Picts, he found it necessary to cross the river Ness; and, when he came to the bank thereof, he sees some of the inhabitants burying a poor unfortunate little fellow, whom, as those who were burying him themselves reported, some water monster had a little before snatched at as he was swimming

From that moment on, by drawing attention to this text, the *Courier* added a spicy new ingredient to the Loch Ness saga. Once established, this link became the foundation stone of a spurious Nessie 'tradition'. It has continued, often in a distorted form, to the present day.

Rupert Gould seems to have been unaware that the St Columba connection was being promulgated in the *Inverness Courier* within a short time of its first 'monster' news item; he cites only a reference to the *Life of Columba* which appeared in the *Scotsman* on 20 October 1933. Fixated on the idea that a solitary sea-serpent had strayed into Loch Ness, Gould was dismissive of a monster tradition, haughtily asserting that he had 'neither the space nor the inclination' to discuss such matters. He certainly had the space, since his Loch Ness material ended on page 168 and he then padded his book out with 52 pages of irrelevant sea-serpent anecdotes.

Constance Whyte was altogether more enthusiastic, suggesting that Adomnán's text 'may be the earliest written reference to the Loch Ness Monster'. Tim Dinsdale was even more thrilled than Mrs Whyte, devoting six pages to what he regarded as a 'fairly sound' account of an encounter with Nessie which contained 'information of most unusual interest'. He cautioned against swimming in the loch.

Today, tourists at the loch are likely to encounter only two publications about the monster on sale. Both are glossy illustrated booklets. One is Adrian Shine's *Loch Ness*. The other is James Carney's *The Loch Ness Monster*, which tells how, according to Columba's biographer, the saint encountered 'a local being attacked by a fiercesome

(*sic*) beast which had risen up from the depths of the loch as the man was swimming close to the shore'. Carney adds, 'the very fact that Adamnan mentions the creature in the loch points to a long-held belief in such things by the local tribes'. Carney has plainly not read the text, nor has he understood Pictish history or the genre of hagiography. When he remarks that 'different versions of the story are told where all the details of what happened, and even the locations vary' he seems blissfully unaware that these versions are modern fabrications which postdate the year 1933 and that his own text supplies a prime example of the imaginative rewriting of someone else's imaginative rewriting of unread source material.

39. St Columba's font, Abriachan.

40. St Columba's burial ground, Invermoriston.

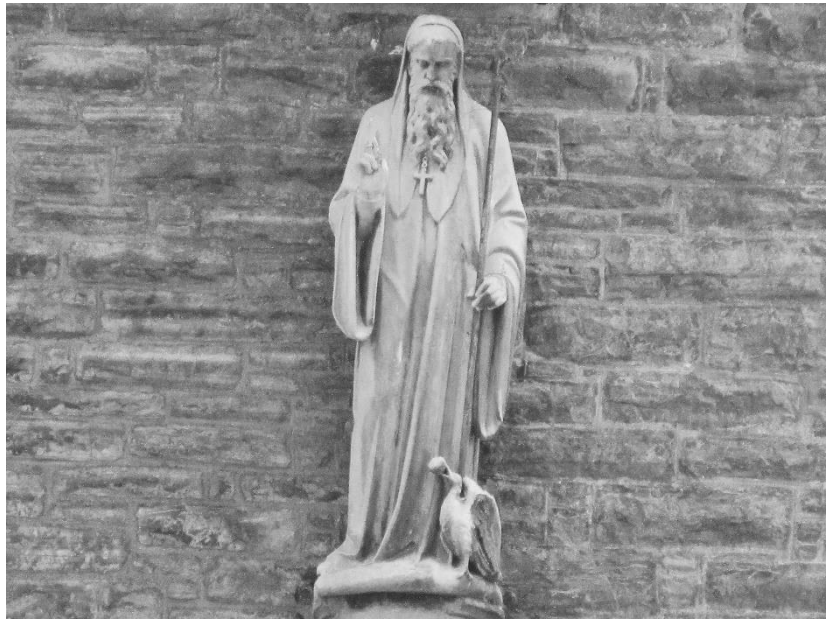
41. St Columba's well, Invermoriston.

42. Suidhe Chuimein ('Cumméne's Seat') overlooking Fort Augustus.

43. Kilchuiman burial ground, the site of the original settlement at Fort Augustus.

44. ‘Inverawe’, Alex Campbell’s riverside home at Fort Augustus.

45 and 46. St Columba on the clock tower of St Benedict's.



21

The Phantom of the Loch

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' (1942)

In searching for the origins of the Loch Ness Monster I think the St Columba sighting is crucial – but not in the way in which it has been traditionally interpreted. This episode did not reinforce the case for Nessie. Rather, it provided *a template which helped to generate a fictitious animal*.

It is surely much more than mere coincidence that Alex Campbell, the man who more than anyone was first responsible for introducing and then energetically promoting the notion of a 'monster' in Loch Ness, lived at Fort Augustus, close to St Benedict's Abbey, in a location saturated with Columba associations. What is also remarkable is the link between Campbell and another Loch Ness phenomenon associated with St Columba:

> Another legend, which is even stranger than that of St. Columba and the monster, concerns a ghost ship which allegedly appears on the loch every twenty years.
>
> The people who tell the story insist that this is a vision of the ship which St. Columba sailed up and down the loch more than 1,400 years ago.

The New York writer David Cooke visited Loch Ness in the 1960s with his wife Yvonne, searching for answers to the Loch Ness mystery. They talked to monster hunters and local people, accumulating material for a book which was based on 'hundreds of hours' of interviews. In the course of their tour of the area they stumbled upon the strange legend of St Columba's ghost ship, supposedly seen on Loch Ness every twenty years. They even spoke to 'One grizzled old man' who was 'only one of the inhabitants of the area who claim to have seen the ship.' The sighting occurred in August 1942, during wartime. The old man described what happened:

> 'I was driving back to the timber camp at Invermoriston late at night. Some of the lorry's springs seemed to have given way, and I got out to examine them. It was pitch black, and I couldn't even see the trees or rocks around me. But there, just thirty yards from shore, was the ship. It had no lights of its own but was spotlighted by something fluorescent, white and bluish and magical. I saw the ropes coiled on the deck and every line of her. She looked like an ancient craft from Biblical times.'

The ship was there for several minutes and then slowly faded away. The old man kept quiet about this strange experience and told no one for three or four years. Then, finally, he told his younger brother.

The eye-witness was Colin Campbell and his younger brother was none other than Alex, the water bailiff and monster advocate. As it turned out, Colin need not have been so bashful. His brother already knew about the ship's existence.

> Unknown to Colin, Alex had been studying the legend of the ghost ship for several years. From Gaelic history he had learned that a number of people in the area, including his own ancestors, had reported seeing the ship in the past. One of these, an old tenant farmer named Alexander Macdonald, said he saw it in 1802. Every twenty years after that it had appeared to someone. A gamekeeper named Finlay Fraser said he saw the ship in 1922.

Curiously, the claim that this spectral vessel is seen only once every twenty years is paralleled by the claim made about the Selisbergsee, a

Swiss lake with a monster tradition. It is supposed to contain fish which surface only once every two decades. If St Columba's ghost ship sailed every twenty years, then a sighting was due in 1962. Sure enough, one occurred and it came to the attention of a local man who happened to be passing minutes after the sighting occurred.

> He had been driving up the loch towards Invermoriston in August…when one of his tyres blew out. He said that as he was changing the tyre an old tramp came running up to him, obviously excited.
>
> 'Hey, mister,' the tramp shouted. 'I've just seen a very strange thing.'
>
> 'Of course, at first I thought he meant the monster… But what he had seen was an exact replica of the ship that had appeared to Colin [Campbell] twenty years previously to the month only a few miles from that spot.
>
> 'The tramp, Thomas O'Connel, an Irishman, told me it had been a beautiful sailing vessel with one mast and ropes coiled on deck. The ship had been sailing at a fast rate, but when it drew close to the tramp, it vanished.'

The man whose fortuitous presence ensured that the tramp's sighting was saved for posterity was, inevitably, Alex Campbell. In 1963 he described the episode to a journalist, explaining:

> 'I have studied Gaelic history and stories behind place names since I was a boy… From the very first I remember hearing tales about ghost ships. You are the first person to hear it from any of us. Up here we do not tell odd stories unless they are true. We tend to be cagey, reticent people. But this has gone on so long that I feel the story of the ship must be told.'

Exactly thirty years after first introducing the Loch Ness Monster, Campbell attempted to promote a new myth – St Columba's ghost ship. Unlike his first, fabulous proposition, this new one failed to find takers. Very few people believe in ghosts and even Nessie enthusiasts shunned Campbell's new mythology.

What is striking about the two legends is how much they have in

common as narratives. Alex Campbell once again positioned himself as the omniscient authority, unveiling a strange, magical presence which might sometimes be found appearing on the surface of the loch. Its presence was testified not by Campbell himself but by third parties, whose sightings were powerfully charged. That famous first encounter with the monster – 'there was something uncanny about the whole thing' (*Inverness Courier*, 2 May 1933) – uses language which applies with equal force to the ghost ship. It, too, is a *strange spectacle*, *uncanny*, altogether out of this world. Campbell, besotted by ghost stories and water-kelpie legends, puts himself forward as the impartial and objective transmitter of truth. A man who used his position as an amateur journalist energetically to purvey monster stories from behind a screen of anonymity, and who never turned down a media interview, coolly and with extraordinary chutzpah represents himself as 'cagey' and 'reticent'. He purports to mediate the truth, never to invent.

Another striking parallel is the way in which, from the very first moment of reportage, Campbell is keen to bolster the eye-witness sighting by situating it within a tradition. In the case of the monster, he asserted its existence had been known 'for generations' and mentioned 'an unknown creature' encountered by some anglers 'a few years ago'. In the case of the ghost ship he supplied four witnesses, who had seen it in 1802, 1922, 1942 and 1962. In his book *In Search of Lake Monsters* (1974), Peter Costello added another to Campbell's list: in 1902 it was seen by Finlay Frazer of Strathenick (a name which is, curiously, almost identical to Campbell's 1922 witness, Finlay Fraser).

Alex Campbell's ghost ship story has been marginalised and ignored by almost all Loch Ness Monster writers, even though it sheds a great deal of light on Campbell's own psyche and upon his role as a local storyteller. The two legends overlap in significant ways. Sometimes the connections are quite specific. Alexander Macdonald, who according to Campbell reported sighting the ghost ship in 1802, also 'saw a strange animal in the loch' on several occasions, dating back to that same magical year 1802. And behind both traditions lies that inescapable figure, St Columba.

What Campbell had in mind when he used the word 'monster' was clarified twenty-eight days later when 'a correspondent' (who can surely only have been Campbell) pointed out that

> It may be mentioned that even the River Ness (in by-gone times) was not immune from the presence of some such beast, for in Adamnan's *Life of St Columba*, as edited and translated by J.T. Fowler, there appears the following (Chapter XXVII):

The report then cites the saint's encounter, using the words 'some river monster' and 'the monster' from the 1895 edition.

Folklore, Daniel Loxton has suggested in connection with Erich Pontoppidan and the evolution of the sea serpent legend, does not confirm sighting reports but rather generates them. This, of course, is surely what happened at Loch Ness. The growing popularity of nineteenth century editions of the Life of Colomba, which translated the neutral term 'Aquatilis bestia' ('water beast') as *monster* fused with the water horse/water kelpie folklore tradition to create the Loch Ness Monster. All it required to make it real was its application to unidentified phenomena on the loch surface. Donaldina Mackay's sighting of a pair of sinuous, moving shapes on the loch surface – almost certainly a boat's wake, glimpsed very briefly from a moving vehicle by an impressionable witness – was all that was required to put empirical flesh on the conceptual bones.

Interestingly, Alex Campbell seems to have been unaware of any water kelpie tradition *directly* associated with Loch Ness, or even the more general material cited by Roland Watson in *The Water Horses of Loch Ness*. Had there been a tradition it is obvious that he would have quoted it in 1933.

It may well be that the episode involving St Columba and the river beast is the unique source of the Loch Ness Monster, via Campbell's reading of one of those misleading nineteenth century translations which described the creature as 'an Aquatic Monster'. If I am correct in my speculation, then Campbell simply treated the *general* water kelpie legend as a further endorsement of the fearsome river beast.

Although the name 'St Columba' can still be found celebrated at various places around Loch Ness, the most vivid representation of the saint's continuing presence in the area is found at Fort Augustus, on the clock tower of St Benedict's Abbey. Here, looking down over the Abbey lawns, the adjacent Caledonian Canal and the parallel River Oich, stands a larger-than-life-size statue of the saint. He has been sculpted as a tall,

slim figure with a long beard beneath which dangles a crucifix. He is holding a stave and looking down, his other hand raised in blessing. At his feet stands a cormorant, with an apple held in its beak.

There is a photograph of this statue in the hardback editions of Nicholas Witchell's *The Loch Ness Story*, but the image has passed unnoticed and uncommented on in Monster literature. At first sight the iconography is perplexing. Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* describes a number of encounters between the saint and animals but none of them involves a cormorant, let alone a cormorant holding on to an apple.

The statue is entirely imaginary since no record survives of Columba's physical appearance, either pictorial or descriptive. His voice is described in the *Life* as loud, powerful and commanding, but even this may well be an invention, designed to bolster his credentials as a saint, a man of great spiritual power and a local representative of the Almighty.

The statue shows a tall, slender man. The buildings of St Benedict's were constructed between 1876 and 1880, and the statue of St Columba is plainly designed to echo popular contemporary imagery of Christ. The style is in the same tradition as the tall, slim Christ of Edward Burne-Jones's 'The Morning of the Resurrection' (1886).

But what of the cormorant? The sculptor seems to have been inspired by Milton. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost* the poet described Satan who, 'on the tree of life, / The middle tree and highest there that grew, / Sat like a cormorant'. The apple in the cormorant's mouth is plainly the Biblical forbidden fruit, representing temptation, sin and the fall of mankind. The stone wings of the statue's cormorant are beginning to open, about to shake off water, or in the process of stretching them out fully to dry. It is a realistic cormorant, apart from two symbolic aspects. Firstly, cormorants do not, of course, eat apples or hold them in their beaks. Secondly, the statue's cormorant has been shrunk in size to further emphasize Columba's supremacy.

The iconography is Biblical, with a dash of Milton. And in its broadest sense the cormorant symbolises the Picts – the indigenous pagans, in thrall to false gods, who needed Columba to win them round to Christianity by the power of his words and his superior magic. That massive staff is both the foot traveller's ancient aid and a magician's wand. As the *Life* attests, Columba was a man who could literally conjure up favourable winds or restrain 'the raging fury of wild beasts'.

The statue's iconography is appropriately Scottish, since the

cormorant is a native bird and cormorants have long been found at the Fort Augustus end of the loch, beside St Benedict's, though there are probably far fewer of them around today than when the Abbey was built. Cormorants have their own role to play in the Loch Ness story, not least where Alex Campbell was concerned. It was Campbell who reported seeing a 30-foot-long Loch Ness Monster in conditions of poor visibility in September 1933: 'I could have sworn that it kept turning its head and also its body very quickly, in much the same way as a cormorant does on rising to the surface.' Some six weeks later he saw the Monster again. As the mist melted away in the sunlight he discovered that what he'd taken to be a large unknown animal 'was nothing more than a few cormorants, and what seemed to be the head a cormorant standing in the water and flapping its wings, as they often do'.

There was one final moment of revelation for me, which occurred when I revisited Loch Ness in May 2016. Although I knew that Alex Campbell had lived in a house beside the River Oich, I had never previously bothered to visit it. Walking down the little dead-end lane to the house, the last in the row, I was intrigued to see that one of the neighbours lived in 'St Columba's Cottage'.

What was altogether more startling was to discover that 'Inverawe', where Alex Cambell lived out his life, directly faced the statue of Saint Columba and the cormorant. It quite literally looked down upon his house. He couldn't step out of his garden gate without seeing Saint Columba looking at him.

I found this discovery both astonishing and enlightening. Saint Columba was a daily presence in Alex Campbell's life, staring down at him like God. What the impact of this statue was, of course, we can never know, and it is something we can only ever speculate about. Alex Campbell was the man who invented the Loch Ness Monster, but he is as mysterious as the sphinx. His commitment to the Monster is a matter of record. The man himself remains impenetrable. We know nothing of his religion or his politics or the books upon his shelf. Even his family life is largely a mystery. He was a guru without a biography.

The Monster begins with Alex Campbell, but its origins will always be a mystery because we are unlikely ever to know about Campbell's intellectual and emotional development. The proximity of the sculpted St Columba and Alex Campbell is an irony matched only by the curious way in which Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* seems like the first Monster book.

It is a book of miraculous events which rest upon eye-witness testimony. Rupert Gould's *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* seems like a strange echo of Adomnán's text. Both authors supply an inventory of extraordinary occurrences. Adomnán, no less than Gould, insists that even the most outlandish and bizarre episodes of his text are true. Men who sang songs in praise of Columba were able to pass through fire and the swords and spears of enemies without hurt, which 'a hundred or more' witnesses could testify was true. Columba's life was filled with miraculous and magical episodes, all of which could be established without doubt, because of the evidence of 'men of exemplary honesty and good faith, who left no room for doubt'. But in a secular age, virtually no one is likely to believe in any of these fantastic tales of prowess. They are merely eloquent Christian propaganda, designed to bolster the faith and quell the doubts of the committed. And this, too, parallels the Loch Ness saga.

Serious interest in Nessie as a real animal has shrivelled away. The decline and fall of the Loch Ness Monster was always inherent in a project which lacked substance. Nessie will continue as a component of the lucrative tourist industry at the loch and for many more years the *Daily Mail* and other publications will doubtless continue to publicise photographs and film footage purporting to be of the Monster. But time and modern technology will continue to reinforce the reality of this monstrous creature's inescapable absence.

Scepticism can never win a decisive victory over faith and the imaginative appeal of the Loch Ness Monster will always transcend logic and reason. As George Orwell once observed, 'One does not dispose of a belief by showing that it is irrational.' But in the end the Loch Ness Monster's fate will be shared with that of the unicorn, or, more recently, the Cottingley fairies – an engaging piece of whimsy which fascinated far more people, for much longer, than anyone could possibly have imagined.

Notes

Preface

'The public simply does not know who the real authorities on Nessie are': Henry H. Bauer: *The Enigma of Loch Ness* (1986), p. 82.

'virtually all the evidence that most others regard as persuasive': *Ibid.*, p. 67.

'Thoughtful people who had read the books of R. T. Gould and Constance Whyte': F. W. Holiday, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* (1968), p. 53.

'a remark probably based on the personal experience of his paid researcher, Nora Sayre': see Burton Bernstein, *Thurber: A Biography* (1975). '"His interest in the Loch Ness Monster was mostly humorous," Nora recalled', p. 443.

'the number of full-length Nessie books exceeds thirty': This statistic refers to what might be called original book studies. It excludes booklets, scissors-and-paste books, compilations of newspaper cuttings, and suchlike, which would take the number to over sixty. For a full list (which includes monographs) see: http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2012/03/books-on-loch-ness-monster_13.html.

'vast and impenetrable, and a place where almost anything could be hiding': Gareth Williams, *A Monstrous Commotion* (2015), p. 295.

'throughout the text, the book makes a case implicitly against the reality of Nessies': see Henry H. Bauer, 'Discoveries and Discoverers', *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, Vol.30, No.3, pp. 432-439.

'to this day it is hard to tell whether or not the author was a satirist or simply deranged': see *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, pp. 41-42. Writing about Cassie six years later Mike Dash was equally perplexed, remarking that 'it isn't really clear' what the author's position really was. Dash concludes, 'I don't think he really believed a word that he wrote.' See Mike Dash, 'Footnote to a Footnote', *Fortean Times* (summer 1989), pp. 66-67.

'gullible in the extreme…the highest expertise': Bauer, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 68-69, 80-81.

'Watson has demonstrably not read the books he rages against': After giving Loxton and Prothero's *Abominable Science!* a one star review on Amazon, Watson conceded that he had read only one chapter of the book – on Nessie – and claimed he would 'read the rest of the book', which includes a ground-breaking analysis of the origins of the Sea Serpent legend, at a later date: https://www.amazon.com/Abominable-Science-Origins-Nessie-Cryptids-ebook/product-reviews/B00BAHA5F2/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_hist_1?ie=UTF8&filterByStar=one_star&reviewerType=all_reviews#reviews-filter-bar.

In the course of a rambling and intemperate one star review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, Watson wrote: 'Unfortunately, for someone who puts himself out as an accomplished researcher, Binns seems yet again unaware of an article of mine from 2011 in which MacDonald recants his scepticism with these words to the *Daily Mail* in 1934: 'If so many reputable people say they have seen "the beast" one inclines to the belief that there is something in it':

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Loch-Ness-Mystery-Reloaded/dp/1999735900/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1550825452&sr=1-1&keywords=the+loch+ness+mystery+reloaded. In fact I mention Watson's 2011 article in *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* and I also discuss MacDonald's comment. Watson's false claim underlines his repeated unreliability as a mediator of texts. Watson's current Amazon 'Reviewer ranking' is some distance from the top ten, standing in February 2019 at #6,555,069.

'The motivating question of the book': https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0Bz0h6YkJ-oq0UHptaDJLQkFSYTZZUjQwaDV2cWYyZw.

'Roland [Watson] believes the creatures are Tulpas or materialised thought forms': https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0Bz0h6YkJ-oq0MUgzWkxDdDJUcUd2WmVRbW9WeVZ4dw.

'an angry, hostile 'review' of a second-hand copy of its predecessor': https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/customer-reviews/R3SFSTG3R2C521/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=0352314877.

'His sense of humour': Obituary, 'Alex Campbell', *Inverness Courier*, 1 July 1983.

'a range of equipment, the controlled use of which will, I believe, ultimately defeat the sceptics': Tim Dinsdale, *The Leviathans* (1966), p. 192.

1. 'Monster! Prehistoric Monster!'

'Thurber's biographer calls it "a rambling report on the Loch Ness monster"': *Op. Cit.*, p. 281.

'Constance Whyte explained in her Author's Note': *More Than a Legend: The Story of the Loch Ness Monster* (1957), p. vii.

'This paradox lies at the heart of the Loch Ness mystery': Ronald Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (1983), p. 165.

'On reaching a high rocky point about 300 yards from the water's edge I saw a huge neck and head': *Scottish Field* (2 June 1934), cited: http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-ba-russell-sighting.html.

'a classic sighting, enshrined as such by both Rupert Gould, who interviewed Russell, and Constance Whyte': see Rupert Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934), pp. 68-70, and Constance Whyte, *More than a Legend*, pp. 85-86.

'Gould was thrilled to find in it an endorsement of his belief in sea-serpents': *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, p. 17.

'exhibited three distinct humps…like a hundred-ton gun partially submerged': Rupert Gould, *The Case for the Sea-Serpent* (1930), p. 191. Further quotations are taken from pp. 188-194.

'the account is armour-plated against scepticism': see *The Loch Ness Monster and Others,* pp. 69-70.

'reiterated some three decades later by Tim Dinsdale': Ronald Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* (2017), p. 137.

'the absolute certainty of a witness is demonstrably no guide to the reality of what they saw': see *ibid*, pp. 118-119.

'Reviving this sighting as a classic in 2018': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-ba-russell-sighting.html.

'Watson erroneously dismisses such possibilities': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-ba-russell-sighting.html?showComment=1540920396723#c8713570915423785294; http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-ba-russell-sighting.html?showComment=1540935573078#c6541978426554078384.; http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-ba-russell-sighting.html?showComment=1540939512239#c6109792731284571 09.

'Our vision is more elaborate than our Polaroids': Richard Gordon, *Great Medical Mysteries* (2001), pp. 103-4.

'Mr J. Harper-Smith, O.B.E., L.L.B., Town Clerk of Lincoln': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/11/harper-smith-and-his-periscope-nessie.html.

'exactly like those portrayed in the London surgeon's photograph': see *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, p. 127.

'as Bernard Crick once cautioned': Audrey Coppard and Bernard Crick, *Orwell Remembered* (1984), p. 9.

'Mrs Moir has travelled widely': Whyte, *Op. Cit.*, p. 63.

'Lady of unimpeachable integrity': *The Leviathans*, p. 206.

'Constance Whyte accepted this story as entirely accurate': see *More Than a Legend*, pp. 74-74.

'A rumour reached me, from more than quarter, that the story was a mere hoax': see *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, p. 88.

'an anecdote emerged of a local garage owner, Alec Menzies': Gareth Williams, *A Monstrous Commotion*, p. 227.

'Rupert Gould was unenthusiastic about endorsing Grant's land sighting': *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, p. 89.

'Another possibility…is that Grant encountered a seal': see Darren Naish, *Hunting Monsters: Cryptozoology and the Reality Behind the Myths* (2017), p. 90.

'she saw something which she took to be the head and neck of some smaller animal – for example, a young deer': *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, pp. 45-46.

'Watson silently deleted this blog post, along with all the comments it had generated': it can still be read online here: https://web.archive.org/web/20160413144833/http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.co.uk/2016/02/an-extraordinary-nessie-story-from-1990.html.

'his blog carried another "Previously Unpublished Monster Sighting"': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2017/01/a-previously-unpublished-monster.html.

'on 5 June 2017, Watson's blog supplied a report of yet another anonymous sighting': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2017/06/a-sighting-from-2006.html.

'she saw something which she took to be the head and neck of some smaller animal – for example, a young deer': Rupert Gould, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 45-6.

'Feltham's investigation was able to establish that the image was obtained elsewhere': https://www.evernote.com/client/snv?noteGuid=d7c50fe0-c670-409a-9562-15492829874f&noteKey=2786cce1c723665649ad17c940400e6c&sn=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.evernote.com%2Fshard%2Fs21%2Fsh%2

Fd7c50fe0-c670-409a-9562-15492829874f%2F2786cce1c723665649ad17c940400e6c&title=Recent%2Bpossible%2Bsighting.

'Months later Watson was still insisting that this obvious fake was "the real deal"': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2019/01/nessie-review-of-2018.html.

'This sighting is recorded in *The Elusive Monster*': p. 158.

'her memory of a confused situation had time to grow dim': *Ibid*., p. 132.

'I regard this letter as important for several reasons': *Ibid*., p. 158.

'Marjorie Moir's Monster sighting is enshrined as a classic': see *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, pp. 114-115, 121-123.

'Malcolm Irvine said he'd had a conversation with Margaret Munro': *Falkirk Herald*, 4 November 1936.

'a short film secured off Inverfarigaig on December 12, 1933': Rupert Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, p. 23.

'The witnesses, almost without exception, impressed me very much indeed': *Ibid*., p. 14.

'By 1936 there was a heavy tangle of traffic from dawn to dusk along the more than sixty miles of new motor roads that encircle the loch': *Thurber: A Biography*, p. 486.

'Before the year 1933 no motor road existed beside Loch Ness': *More Than a Legend*, p. 21.

'echoed by gullible believers from Tim Dinsdale in 1961 to Adrian Shine in 1983 to Nick Redfern and Karl Shuker in 2016': see Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 40; Adrian Shine, 'The biology of Loch Ness', *New Scientist* (17 February 1983), p. 462; Nick Redfern, *Nessie: Exploring the Supernatural Origins of the Loch Ness Monster* (2016), pp. 55-56; Karl Shuker, *Here's Nessie: A Monstrous Compendium from Loch Ness* (2016), p. 19.

'Today most traffic uses the northerly lakeside road, built by the commissioners': Julian Glover, *Man of Iron: Thomas Telford and the building of Britain* (2017), p. 241.

'Constance Whyte described one aspect of its behaviour which had been witnessed some three years before her first written contribution to the subject': *More Than a Legend*, p. 30.

'[Rupert] Gould himself never returned to Loch Ness': *A Monstrous Commotion*, p. 44.

'Constance Whyte quotes three indignant letters to the *Field* denouncing the seal theory': *Op. Cit*., pp. 114-117.

'I showed him a large picture of the family of Plesiosaurs which demonstrated clearly a dozen different types': *Loch Ness Monster*, pp. 232-233.

'Quite recently Mrs Cameron had collected Brooke Bond picture cards': Tim Dinsdale, *Project Water Horse* (1975), p. 198.

2. Listen to the Lion

Material in this chapter is drawn from:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-19388301.

https://mobile.twitter.com/EssexPoliceUK/status/239849711840944129.

http://www.itv.com/news/2012-08-27/police-taking-essex-lion-hunt-seriously/.
https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/essex-lion-revealed-the-ginger-cat-1283131.
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2194481/Essex-lion-Teddy-cat-time-ginger-tom-cat-doesnt-need-police-escort.html.
https://www.theguardian.com/travel/reality-check/2012/aug/27/lion-loose-essex-real-story.
https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/aug/27/essex-lion-beast-of-bodmin-folklore.
http://heresycorner.blogspot.com/2012/08/lion-hunting-in-essex.html.

'The public are not very good at identifying the most common exotic animals': John Ezard, 'Lion alert panic in London suburb', *The Guardian* (12 March 1994), p. 3.

'I went on Dartmoor alone one winter dusk in 1946': John Fowles, *Wormholes* (1999), p. 146.

'yellowish-brown in colour, almost mustard-coloured': F. W. Holiday, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* (1968), p. 105.

'had no idea that there were yellowish [Monsters] as well as black ones': *Ibid*., p. 106.

'made Loch Ness history': *Ibid*., p. 108.

'either not animals at all or, if they are, that they exist within a matrix of causation that is quite unlike any other living thing': F. W. Holiday, *The Dragon and the Disc* (1973), p. 186.

'the rather strange views he had gradually developed since starting his hunt for the Loch Ness monster': Colin Wilson with Damon Wilson, *The Encyclopedia of Unsolved Mysteries* (1989), p. 131.

'the immense frustration experienced by monster-hunters in the 1970s and 1980s': *Ibid*., p. 132.

3. Tim Dinsdale's Breakfast

'driving from Dores to Foyes (again on the north bank of the loch)': David Clarke, *Britain's X-Traordinary Files* (2014), p. 177.

'was eating breakfast when he was amazed to see what he believed was a creature': *Ibid*., p. 186.

'about 3pm' with the 'sun shining brightly': Rupert Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934), p. 39.

'They produced an intriguing report that said there was something in this': David Clarke, *How UFOs Conquered the World* (2015), p. 111.

'The report accepted the film as genuine': Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (fourth edition, 1982), p. 125.

'JARIC's conclusions about the object not being a boat or a submarine were not based on its mathematical analysis': see *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 123.

'recording the fact that on the 21st and 23rd of April, 1960': Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), pp. 107-8.

'when I have studied this I will present my report in detail': David Clarke, *Op. Cit.*, p. 186.
'As the hours passed, I began to think of breakfast': Tim Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 99.

4. The Other 1933 Monster

'a zealous observer of Caphalopods in the North Sea': Richard Ellis, *The Search for the Giant Squid* (1999), p. 97.
'the creature the ancients called "the kraken"': *Ibid.*, p. 2.
'its existence was, for many years, entirely discredited by scientific men': Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster and Others* (1934), p. 138.
'speedily transformed what had hitherto been regarded as an old wives' tale': *Ibid.*, p. 163.
'He was faithful to Science in his lifetime': Nicholas Witchell, *The Loch Ness Story* (revised and updated edition, 1989), p. 205.
'In fact, it proves difficult to pin down the kraken's appearance': Darren Naish, *Hunting Monsters* (2017), p. 53.
'See the account which Erik Pontoppidan, the Norwegian bishop': Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Selected Poems*, ed. Christopher Ricks (2007), p. 303.
'His pretended history, as well as his ingenious, but disingenuous theory, was drawn from his imagination': Henry Lee, *The Octopus* (1875), f.n., p. 105.
'That it is of the "sea-serpent" type, I consider to be demonstrated': Gould, *Op. Cit.*, p. 164.
'victims of some form of mass-hallucination': *Ibid.*, p. 163.
'abominable creatures': see 'The Sea Raiders' in H. G. Wells, *The Country of the Blind and Other Selected Stories* (2007), ed. Patrick Parrinder, pp. 153-163.
'Writing in 1998, Richard Ellis described': *Op. Cit.*, p. 106.
'a somewhat optimistic title': Rupert Gould, *The Case for the Sea-Serpent* (1930), p. 20.

5. A Neglected Loch Ness Author

'Roy Mackal magisterially asserted': *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (1976), p. 143.
'the oldest and most distinguished literary prize in Britain': Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (2015), p. 174.
'without doubt [his] best and most characteristic volume of poetry': *Ibid.*, p. 164.
'Ted Hughes also fantasized about the monster and Her Majesty': *Ibid.*, p. 228.
'quirky encounters (though not, he regretted, with the Loch Ness monster)': *Ibid.*, p. 305.
'a mildewed tent at the lake's edge': *Ibid.*, p. 559.
'Burton explained that he found the case for the sea-serpent and the Loch Ness Monster compelling': Maurice Burton, *Living Fossils* (1954), p. 270.
'turned on its side, and undulated its body violently': *Ibid.*, p. 272.
'a giant aquatic amphibian': Mackal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 216.
'double-hump aspect': *Ibid.*, p. 153.

'the back of an African buffalo': *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 100.
'Awestruck': *Ibid*., p. 102.
'I will never let go': Letter to Peter Scott 15 May 1960, cited in Gareth Williams, *Op. Cit*., p. 83.

6. A Note on Orwell and the Monster

'Presumably an hallucination': *George Orwell, A Life in Letters*, ed. Peter Davison (2011), p. 13.
'How can you be sure your enemy won't cut it out and work some sort of black magic on it?': Richard Rees, *Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* (1961), p. 44.
'the charm of useless knowledge': George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. 2 (1970), p. 50.
'under great strain, delusion was beginning to replace conscious fraudulence': Nicholas Tomalin and Ron Hall, *The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* (2016), p. 132.
'on his final tape recording, Crowhurst insisted': *Ibid*., p. 198.
'the multi-hump body shape sometimes exhibited by our old chum in Loch Ness': Tim Dinsdale, *The Leviathans* (1966), p. 164.
'Orwell thought that this was an anecdote well worth repeating': see George Orwell, *A Kind of Compulsion*, ed. Peter Davison, revised and updated edition (2000), p. 270.

7. Monster Books: The Top Ten

'fairly summed up by this comment': Colin Wilson with Damon Wilson, *The Encyclopedia of Unsolved Mysteries* (1989), p. 126.
'the tremendous production of foam so often reported': Maurice Burton, *The Elusive Monster* (1961), p. 45.
'due to mats of vegetable matter buoyed up by gas': *Ibid*., p. 107.
'I cannot dismiss the idea of a long-necked animal haunting the waters and the shores of Loch Ness': *Ibid*., p. 159.
'impelled by the knowledge that Loch Ness contains nature's ultimate horror': F. W. Holiday, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* (1968), p. 46.
'secretly amused': Tim Dinsdale, *Project Water Horse* (1975), p. 133.
'Scepticism does not sell well': Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World* (1996), p. 9.
'a model among such studies': *Scientific American* (September 1985), p. 24.
'The book should certainly be read in full by anyone planning an expedition to Loch Ness': John Fairley and Simon Welfare, *Arthur C. Clarke's Chronicles of the Strange and Mysterious* (1989), p. 86.

8. The Monster and the Unicorn.

'Dinsdale concluded': *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 158.

'Perhaps the explanation lies in the sense of unreality': *The Leviathans* (1966), p. 17.
'the beast-with-a-little-horn of Dubhrachan': Michel Meurger with Claude Gagnon, *Lake Monster Traditions* (1988), p. 136.
'To me the specific existence of the unicorn seems not incredible': Charles Gould, *Mythical Monsters* (1886), p. 3.
'if the evidence of eyewitnesses was worth pursuing at all': Mackal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.
'whatever the identity of the animals in Loch Ness, they exist': *Ibid.*, p. 216.
'even now the existence or non-existence of this remarkable animal': Charles Gould, *Op. Cit.*, p. 338.
'the unicorn may be merely a hybrid': *Ibid.*, p. 364.
'a generic name for several distinct species of (probably) now extinct animals': *Ibid.*, pp. 364-365.
'I am preparing a sequel to it, *Loch Ness and the Water Unicorn*': *Loch Ness Monster* (1982), p. 218.
'Nessie in the 80s has, if anything, been going backwards': quoted in Williams, *A Monstrous Commotion*, p. 202.
'as the biologist Peter Hogarth has shown': see Peter Hogarth, 'Mythical Animals', *Biologist*, 31(1), 1984, pp. 44-48.
'Daniel Loxton makes an important point': *Abominable Science!* (2013), p. 257.

9. Charade

'Scotland, where the Loch Ness monster charade has persisted for decades': *The Science of Monsters* (2013), pp. 90-91.
'serious scientists are still looking for the Loch Ness Monster': *Raven Seek Thy Brother* (1976), p. 92. The book was first published in 1968.
'a dying race ... zoologists and scientists from all countries will come to study': *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), pp. 244-5.
'a national research station': see Ian Gilchrist, 'Tim quit his job to prove that Nessie really exists', *Sunday Express*, 1 October 1972.
'on the brink of confirmation': Tim Dinsdale, *Project Water Horse* (1975), p. 133.
'Almost seventy years ago the formula for success was helpfully set out': C. E. Whyte, *The Loch Ness Monster* (1950), p. 12.
'Some years later she added two more details which favoured a sighting': *More Than a Legend*, pp. 94-95.
'Maurice Burton was the first to point out this glaring contradiction between her serene certainties and the barren consequences of acting upon them': see *The Elusive Monster*, p. 23.
'In her first writing on the subject she asserted that the monster's neck was about five feet long': *The Loch Ness Monster*, p. 8.
'and mentioned the capture of a sea-serpent at Oban in April 1877': *Ibi*d., p. 13.
'There are a number of peculiarities attributed to snakes, particularly water snakes': *Ibid.*, p. 14.
'She now spoke with even greater confidence and authority about the Monster's physiology and behaviour': see *More Than a Legend*, pp. 89-95.
'the humps might indeed be structural parts of the animal – and that, *in addition*,

a large air sac or auxiliary lung might be superimposed on top of them': *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 237.
'Monster Hunter's Photographic Formula': *Ibid*., p. 242.
'During the whole of the Cambridge expedition's 480 hours vigil': quoted in Peter Costello, *In Search of Lake Monsters*, p. 96.
'In fact, it would not have the earthquake on any terms and laughed it to scorn': *The Cambria News and Merioneth Standard* (18 May 1877), p. 7.
'It is thought in Oban that this will be a warning to able editors not to speak slightingly of earthquakes': *Ibid*.
'in *More Than a Legend*, she cited four eye-witness encounters': *Op. Cit*., p. 153.
'He made that assertion in the first edition of *Loch Ness Monster*': p. 233.
'The back of the animal shown is exactly what I saw first *end on* through my binoculars, before starting to film': *Ibid*., p. 156.
'The Monster unquestionably exhibits two or three basic humps': *Ibid*., p. 237.
'To look at the man and to listen to his story you had an immediate urge to believe him': Quoted in Carl Sagan, *This Demon-Haunted World* (1996), p. 96.
'900º Fahrenheit surface temperature': *Ibid*.
'Colin Wilson commented': *The Encyclopedia of Unsolved Mysteries,* p. 132.
'One of the 1972 photographs showed very clearly an object like a large flipper': *Ibid*., pp. 131-2.
'In 1976 Roy Mackal, a director of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau and Professor of biochemistry at the University of Chicago': *Ibid*., p. 132.
'the lake has been the site of strange observations for over 1,400 years': Mackal, *Op. Cit*., pp. 8-9.
'I could not explain it, try as I would': *Ibid*., p. 13.
'we have direct photographic evidence as to the probable shape of the central back region of the animal': *Ibid*., p. 102.
'These are the most significant photographs to date of our Loch Ness animal': *Ibid*., p. 111.
'If the scientific establishment was willing to change its mind, this book should have changed it': Wilson, *Op. Cit*., p. 132.
'finally identified and classified': *Ibid*., p. 134.
'My own feeling about the problem is that many different phenomena have tickled over-wrought imaginations': E.A.E., 'Monster of the Imagination?', *Eastern Daily Press*, 26 May 1958.
'having seen one of them I would never bathe in the lake': *The Leviathans,* p. 94.
'removed to the Brooklands Museum in Weybridge, where it remains on public display': See Robin Holmes, *One of Our Aircraft* (1991).
'two black humps moving in line': Rupert Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, p. 39.
'published in Gareth Williams's *A Monstrous Commotion* (2015)': see Plate 43.
'my discussion of this photograph in *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* (2017): p. 84.
'He cites "Renowned monster hunter Tim Dinsdale"': *Op. Cit*., p. 11.
'looked very much like hard-hatted divers helmets!': *Loch Ness Monster* (1982), p. 199.
'the reflection is in the wrong place': *Op. Cit*., p. 29.
'regarded as an expert but a sceptic': *Ibid*., p. 33.

'"almost certainly" a swan': *Op. Cit.*, p. 95.
'it would simply destroy the swan argument'*: Photographs of the Loch Ness Monster*, p. 38.
'superior image': *Ibid.*, p. 39.
'The reason the publishers used the poor quality image is because that's the one they purchased from the picture library they used': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2016/02/is-hugh-gray-photograph-swan.html?showComment=1456057431257#c2920665904266692791.
'published in the wrong order to the captions': *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, Plates 16(a) and 16(b).
'Watson, citing *The Elusive Monster*': *Photographs of the Loch Ness Monster*, p. 77.
'These astonishing creatures': see Erich Hoyt, *Weird Sea Creatures* (2013).
'one in five species may be at risk from climate change': https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/06/first-mammal-extinct-climate-change-bramble-cay-melomys/.
'may even cause the extinction of humanity':http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html.

10. The Land Sightings.

'either a pleasantry or a rather unconvincing attempt at a hoax': *Op. Cit.*, p. 44.
'entirely *bona fide*': *Ibid.*
'a huddle of deer': see Jonathan Betts, *Time Restored* (2011), p. 259.
'I can only suppose that he either underestimated the size of the creature he saw…': *Op. Cit.*, p. 89.
'a probable length of 45 feet or so': *Ibid.*, p. 155.
'Constance Whyte had no qualms about accepting the Grant land sighting as genuine': *More Than a Legend*, p. 73.
'Mrs MacLennan's sighting': *Ibid.*, p. 80.
'a most peculiar and horrifying animal in the bushy swamp in Urquhart Bay': *Ibid.*, p. 79.
'Mrs Cameron's memory': *Ibid.*, p. 80.
'a recent 1960 sighting of the animal partly out of the water on the south shore': Dinsdale, *Op. Cit.*, p. 144.
'an historical anecdote supplied by Alfred Cruickshank': *Ibid.*, p. 146.
'Torquil MacLeod': He was not identified by name in the first edition of Dinsdale's *Loch Ness Monster*.
'a slight movement upon the opposite shore': Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 142.
'It occurred in conditions of poor visibility': In *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (p. 93) I noted that Dinsdale's version of this sighting failed to tally with the description given in David James's booklet *Loch Ness Investigation*, published by 'The Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau Ltd) (undated; c.1967), p. 18. This suggested that Macleod elaborated his story, contradicting himself. In fact, there was no contradiction. James had very carelessly conflated the Margaret Munro land sighting of 3 June 1934 with Macleod's 28 February 1960 sighting. The error was entirely David James's, attributing

aspects of the Munro sighting to that of Macleod's some twenty-six years later. James did not source of any of the material cited in his booklet.

'one creature in Loch Ness which is of gargantuan proportions': Dinsdale, *Loch Ness Monster*, p. 145.

'Richard Raynor proposed a different explanation': www.academia.edu/20148125/Torquil_MacLeod_1960_study.

'sat for several hours... peering through binoculars': *Loch Ness Monster* (1961), p. 90.

'as I pointed out in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, Torquil MacLeod's expectation of seeing a Monster was in itself fuelled by Constance Whyte': *Op. Cit.*, pp. 92-3.

'these three sightings': see Rupert Gould, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 39-43.

'A slightly different version of this sighting appeared in Nicholas Witchell's *The Loch Ness Story*': *Op. Cit.* (1979), p. 132.

'perhaps understandable in view of the poor light and the brevity of the sighting': *Ibid.*

'the circumstances, of surprise, poor light, the purely momentary sighting and the passage of time': Dinsdale, *Op. Cit.*, p. 148.

'I think it is conceivable that with its body sideways on, and its head swung round': *Ibid.*, p. 150.

'We now know that memories are not fixed or frozen, like Proust's jars of preserves': Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations* (2012), p. 154.

'possessed significant similarities to Lachlan Stewart's three-humped Monster': see Ronald Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded* (2017), p. 107.

'Marshall McLuhan once famously observed': in *Understanding Media* (1964).

'the largest land animal on this planet': *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

'Some people as we know love to tell tall tales and make things up': Malcolm Robinson, *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (2016), p. 102.

'Alleged land sightings must be regarded with some doubt': David Martin and Alastair Boyd: *Nessie: The Surgeon's Photograph Exposed* (1999), p. 31.

'It is something which the majority of people prefer not to believe': *Loch Ness Monster*, p. 235.

'Henry H. Bauer': see *The Enigma of Loch Ness* (1986), p. 67.

'the theory that the Spicers made the entire thing up and was a hoax': *When Monsters Come Ashore*, p. 29.

'Whatever it was Mr Spicer had seen, the publicity surrounding his letter immediately gave the monster a new lease of life': Ronald Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 21.

'Mr Spicer's description': *Ibid.*, p. 189.

'may now believe in the deer theory': Watson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

'a startling retraction of the Spicer sighting': see Ronald Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, p. 238.

'He cites Spicer's doctored letter without acknowledging that it has been altered': *When Monsters Come Ashore*, p. 51.

'A rumour reached me, from more than one quarter, that the story was a mere hoax': Gould, *Op. Cit.*, p. 88.

'prominent Nessie sceptic Tony Harmsworth': Watson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

'As with the Spicers, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* accepted that this sighting

occurred': *Op. Cit*., pp. 189-190.
'Darren Naish's analysis': *Hunting Monsters*, p. 90.
'We grow ever more confident in our memories as they develop blurred edges': Jules Montague, *Lost and Found* (2018), p. 48.
'excused by Watson on the grounds of variations in gender, age and behaviour': *Op. Cit*., p. 211.
'Certain discrepancies': *More Than a Legend*, p. 179.
'Alastair Mackintosh's account of meeting Alec Muir in his "T" Ford': see Captain Alastair Mackintosh, *No Alibi* (1961), pp. 26-27.
'F. W. Holiday was the first person to spot this anecdote and absorb it into Nessie lore': see *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* (1968), p. 11.
'Watson (who manages to misquote Mackintosh's account both on his blog and in his book)': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2011/05/classic-sightings-alec-muir.html.
The sentence 'Augustus monks professed to have seen the monster actually swimming in the loch' should read: 'And I remember Maurice Baring telling me that one of the Fort Augustus monks professed to have seen the monster actually swimming in the loch.'
'he produced his memoir over a two year period': *No Alibi*, p. 188.
'Mackintosh describes a trip to Urquhart Castle': *Ibid*., p. 18.
'in a state of turmoil over an area extending to several hundred square yards': *More Than a Legend*, p. 82.
'as if casks were being rolled across the floor': *No Alibi*, p. 70.
'He *had* to tell a story, however much at variance with the facts': *Ibid*., p. 66.
'it is a bit unusual that nothing was reported in the years between 1936 and 1960': *Op. Cit*., p. 174.
'but, alas, he told me he had lost it when his laptop had a hard disk failure!': *Ibid*., p. 199.

11. The Silence

'Book of the Week': 'Sinking a Legend', *Daily Express* (12 May 1983).
'Back in 1972 he was already telling visitors': see Victor Perera, *The Loch Ness Monster Watchers* (1974), p. 30.
'There must be at least 50,000 people waiting to buy a book with my name on it': material on Searle's unpublished writing is drawn from files D885/1/1, D885/1/2 and D885/2/1, the Highland Archive Service, Highland Archive Centre, Inverness.
'Henry Bauer solemnly informed his readers': *Journal of Scientific Exploration* VII, 2 (1993), p. 124.
'the *Times* obituary': 30 May 2005.
'rather prematurely titled': http://www.loch-ness.org/personalities.html#binns.
'infinitesimally remote': Tony Harmsworth, *Loch Ness, Nessie & Me* (2010), p. 331.
'Harmsworth would later grumble': http://www.loch-ness.org/personalities.html#bremner.
'longstanding interest in the Loch Ness legend': Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar,

'Sonar and Photographic Searches for the Loch Ness Monster: A Reassessment' in *Science Confronts the Paranormal*, ed. Kendrick Frazier (1986), p. 349.

'sufficient scientific credibility that a zoological classification has been ascribed to the creature': *Ibid*.

'Any sonar target over 3 metres in length moving under the grid triggered an alarm': *Ibid*., p. 350.

'This expedition had the advantage of being able to image in three dimensions and obtain an actual tissue sample': *Ibid*., p. 349.

'By July 25, 1983, the array was fully functional': *Ibid*., p. 350.

'Our conversations during the summer of 1983 with Ivor Newby': *Ibid*., p. 357.

'doubts about the way in which the image was being interfered with': *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 154.

'by no means impossible…fortuitous': *Ibid*., p. 155.

'The problem, they established, lay not in the computer enhancement of the images but in the doctoring of the enhanced versions. They also revealed that the circumstances under which the images had been obtained were different to those described by the Academy': Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar, *Op. Cit*., pp. 353-356.

'My book criticised the sonar evidence from Loch Ness': *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 151.

'charmlessly and incoherently suggesting that publication of the book was held over until Campbell died': https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/customer-reviews/R3SFSTG3R2C521/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=0352314877.

'was probably too weak to answer the charges': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2017/04/poor-old-alex-campbell-part-iii.html.

'Mrs Mackay told Rupert Gould it occurred on 14 April': *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, p. 39.

'In fact porpoises were reported in Loch Ness in 1914, when lochside resident Campbell was thirteen years old': see *The Loch Ness Mystery Reloaded*, p. 41.

'in the opinion of Mr F. Sutherland, Lovat Terrace, who had a good view of the creature, it is nothing more startling than a sturgeon': *Dundee Courier*, 9 June 1933.

'the most refreshing "monster" book I've read in years': Jerry G. Walls, 'Book Review', *Tropical Fish Hobbyist*, 34(7), March 1986, p. 100.

'the author has certainly done his homework': *Best Sellers* Vol.45, No.2 (May 1985).

'extremely close to the shore and in shallow water': *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 100.

'There's no doubt at all in my mind that the arrival of Tim Dinsdale at Foyers': *Loch Ness Investigation* (unpublished manuscript), p. 36.

'If the money was ever made available': *Ibid*., p. 37.

'a rave review': Alan Brien, 'Popular Prejudice', *New Statesman*, 13 July 1984.

12. The Shining

'Shine always knew that he would not make friends by trying to demystify the Loch': *Op. Cit*., p. 198.

'The biology of Loch Ness': *New Scientist* (17 February 1983), pp. 462-467.

'the same Roy Mackal who regarded Lachlan Stuart's photograph': see Roy P. Mackal, *The Monsters of Loch Ness* (1976), pp. 102 and 277.

'The results had been disappointing': see Dr Peter Baker, 'Echo-Sounding as a Method of Searching Underwater in Loch Ness', Appendix B, F. W. Holiday, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness* (1968), pp. 197-203.

'The largest salmon ever caught in Britain': http://www.wildfisher.co.uk/wildfisher/index.php/articles/articles-index-newest-first/546-georgina-ballantine.

'The results of Peter Baker's team's sonar search': *Op. Cit*., pp. 201-202.

'F. W. Holiday described': *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*, p. 11.

'David James sent out a private communication to Loch Ness Investigation members': cited in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 150.

'Ted Holiday had dourly questioned the value of such evidence': *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*, p. 204.

'That sceptic was one Adrian J. Shine': Adrian J. Shine, *Loch Morar Expedition 1973-75* (November 1975). http://www.lochnessproject.org/adrian_shine_archiveroom/papershtml/loch_ness_morar_report_1975.HTM.

'first came seeking fame and fortune, that there was a wildlife mystery and I was the one to solve it': http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-22125981 .

'here was an easy prize': Adrian Shine, *Loch Ness* (2006), p. 16.

'I came to conquer': Williams, *Op. Cit*., p. 194.

'he decided that he was going to solve the Loch Ness Mystery': *Loch Ness, Nessie and Me*, p. 55.

'The object of this expedition has been to establish the identity of the large unknown animal of the Scottish lochs': Adrian J. Shine, *Loch Morar Expedition 1973-75* (November 1975). http://www.lochnessproject.org/adrian_shine_archiveroom/papershtml/loch_ness_morar_report_1975.HTM.

'an active study of the environment, in order to place the mystery in context': http://www.lochnessproject.org/adrian_shine_archiveroom/loch_ness_archive_timeline.htm.

'successfully dodged the most prolonged and systematic watch ever kept for a single species of animal': *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*, p. 162.

'An explanation based on chance seemed to me most unsatisfactory': *The Dragon and the Disc*, p. 183.

'not animals at all': *Ibid*., p. 186.

'too open to artifacts and misinterpretation': *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*, p. 200.

'his 1985 review of *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*': *Cryptozoology* (Vol. IV, 1987), pp. 83-86.

'my critique of the bogus Monster "tradition" referenced five Nessie authors': *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 50.

'Henry Bauer quotes from a very revealing newsletter which Adrian Shine sent out in April 1980': Bauer, *Op. Cit*., p. 82.

'what the *Mail on Sunday* unkindly described': 'Mr Shine's £120,000 Net Loss Monster' (18 October 1987).

'rather vague about what he did for a living': Peter Dunn, 'Monster fleet hunts a dripping corpse'. Unidentified press cutting, 1987.

'the best opinion now believes the creature to be a seal': Sir Edward Mountain, 'Solving the Mystery of Loch Ness', *The Field* (22 September 1934), p. 669.

'Others have noted': Jonathan Tulloch, 'Nature Notebook', *The Times*, 2 September 2017.

'A seal entered the sea lock at Clachnaharry': *More Than a Legend*, p. 26.

'Shine fails to provide any clue as to how large a fish would have to be to return an echo of similar strength': *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (1984), p. 222.

'Some feel that the mystery was solved in the 1980s when people such as Adrian Shine synthesised a theory': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2015/09/nessie-faq.html.

'Josh Bazell describes me': http://news.nationalpost.com/afterword/josh-bazell-loch-ness-motives .

'Ever generous': http://news.nationalpost.com/afterword/josh-bazell-the-inventor-of-the-loch-ness-monster .

'an unspecified television documentary, in other words he worked with several transpositions from the original, with inevitable losses in quality': http://henryhbauer.homestead.com/_NessieChapter.pdf.

'Bauer was scornful of Shine's own later attempts to debunk the Dinsdale film': http://henryhbauer.homestead.com/16.2_bauer.pdf.

'At one point he allegedly even contemplated taking legal action, although none was forthcoming': *Ibid*.

'It was not until 2003 that he published a lengthy paper on the footage': http://www.lochnessinvestigation.com/dinsdale%20paper%202003%20V2.pdf.

'which noted that JARIC had avoided analysis of "wake and wash patterns" on the grounds that this lay outside its competence: *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*, p. 124.

'This dark shadow had gone when Dinsdale later filmed the dinghy': *Ibid*., p. 120.

'the identical argument made twenty years earlier in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved*': p. 122.

'Later that year Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar would also question Adrian Shine's competence': Rikki Razdan and Alan Kielar, *Op. Cit*., pp. 351-352.

'True investigation should simply discover the facts': Adrian Shine, *Loch Ness* (2006), inside cover introduction.

'if I am known as a sceptical investigator then it probably goes back to my resolution that night, that if I couldn't trust my own eyes, I shouldn't trust anybody else's either': *Ibid*., pp. 16-17.

'his desire to get to the bottom of the mystery and, if possible, to identify whatever it is that has been responsible for so many believable sightings by eyewitnesses': Nicholas Witchell, *The Loch Ness Story* (revised edition, 1989), p. 188.

'before the weight of evidence tipped from positive to negative': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.com/2018/08/tricks-of-sceptics.html?showComment=1535197792814#c2952590437051362544.

13. The Bauer War

'His review quivered with rage and fizzed with indignation': see *Nessletter*, June 1985, pp. 4-8, available online at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0Bz0h6YkJ-oq0X003Y3ROS3dRaHFCd10yczAybmtvUQ.

'Daniel Loxton views it as highly relevant to the Spicer sighting; Gareth Williams describes its impact as "electrifying"': see *Abominable Science!*, pp. 129-134, and *A Monstrous Commotion*, p. 272.

'Adrian Shine likewise finds it relevant to the Loch Ness story': see *Loch Ness*, p. 7.

'During the first fortnight of the search, however, visibility was very good, and various watchers secured a total of 21 photographs': Sir Edward Mountain, 'Solving the Mystery of Loch Ness', *The Field* (22 September 1934), p. 668.

'I'm compulsive...I tend to paranoia over any administrative slight or blunder': https://archive.org/stream/henryhbauercolle1318unse/henryhbauercolle1318unse_djvu.txt.

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'Dinsdale's unique film could be one of Burton's hypothesized mats of vegetation': *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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'Margaret Munro famously watched the monster through binoculars for 25 minutes': see Whyte, *More Than a Legend*, pp. 81-82.

'Duncan Cameron saw the monster near Urquhart Castle': *Inverness Courier*, 27 July 1934.

'Two Benedictine Brothers at the Abbey': *Inverness Courier*, 22 January 1935.

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'Rines hinted he would be returning to the loch with some recently declassified US government equipment': *Ibid.*, p. 37.
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'Tony Harmsworth describes': see *Loch Ness, Nessie & Me* (2010), p. 215.

'He passed a headland and then something took his breath away': *Ibid*., p. 216.

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'Shine's quest began with an encounter': Billy Baker, *Op. Cit*.

'If we have any faith in human nature, then the sheer volume of testimony justifies the search': Adrian Shine, 'To catch a monster…': *The Unexplained*, Vol. 2 (issue 14), p. 268.

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'Rupert Gould considered it': *The Loch Ness Monster and Others*, pp. 136-137.

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'exclusive exhibition rights to evidence collected with that equipment': Harmsworth, *Loch Ness, Nessie and Me* (2010), p. 108.

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'the near mythical seiche effect': http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.co.uk/2017/02/analysis-of-ge-taylor-film.html.

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'both a landmark and a turning point in the Monster's fortunes': *Ibid*., p. 65.
'the sceptics' assault on the photographic evidence': *Ibid*., p. 229.
'could easily be a wave effect resulting from three trawlers': *Op. Cit*., p. 102.
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'The landscape itself produces the appropriate atmosphere of mystery and expectation': *Op. Cit*., p. 87.
'Gould claimed that "The presence of the vessel herself would, I imagine, very soon undeceive the most casual observer"': *Op. Cit*., pp. 183-184.
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'I look at Nicholas Witchell on the news': Jeremy Clarkson, 'Sun, seeds and squirrels – it's hell in the parks police', *Sunday Times*, 31 July 2016, p. 33.
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'the potential danger faced by those who swim in waters inhabited by these animals': *The Leviathans*, p. 94.
'If encountered on land, with no ready access to water': *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*, p. 155.
'Around 1600 Captain John Monck… Olaus Magnus luridly identified': see Emma Phipson, *The Animal-Lore of Shakespeare's Time* (1883), pp. 87-89.

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'killed by the power of his terrible word': Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba* (tr. Richard Sharpe, 1995), p. 175.
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'Why did this story not happen on some other body of water named in Columba's travels': *The Water Horses of Loch Ness* (2011), p. 66.
'St Columba climbed the steep path to King Bridei's fortress': *Life of St Columba*, p. 184.
'At once the bars were thrust back': *Ibid.*
'and at that moment his voice was miraculously lifted up': *Ibid.*, p. 141.
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'Even the heathen natives who were present at the time': *Life of St Columba*, p. 176.

18. Modernity and the Absent Monster

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'to provide the northern part of Scotland with something close to the main road network it has today': Julian Glover, *Man of Iron: Thomas Telford and the Building of Britain* (2017), p. 185.
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'Even in its unfinished state the Canal put Fort Augustus on the traveller's route': *Ibid.*, p. 89.
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19. The Invention of Scott-Land

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'One of the most extraordinary aspects of Waverley's imbecility': *The Life of Walter Scott*, p. 174.

'a shameless parade of kilts, bagpipes, sporrans': *Ibid*., p. 258.

'The nineteenth century publisher Robert Cadell': cited *ibid*., p. 141.

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'Scotland came increasingly to be identified at a variety of levels as an archetypal land of romance': Andrew Hook, 'Introduction' to *Waverley* (1985), p. 11.

'the whole of Scotland is Scott-land': David Gray, *Letters*, cited in *Scott-Land*, p. 310.

'Charles St. John may have raged against the arrival of "cockneys" whom, he grumbled, spoiled his fishing at Loch Ness': *Short Sketches of the Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands* (1846), pp. 7-8.

'connection by railway, and the Caledonian Canal with the south': Weld, *Op. Cit*., p. 312.

'a motley crowd of tourists': *Ibid*., p. 316.

'As soon as we were within sight of the Fort': *Ibid*., p. 317.

'A large proportion of our passengers paid their shilling': *Ibid*.

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'Scotland sang its Jacobite songs for another hundred years': John Prebble, *The King's Jaunt* (1988), p. 365.
'Walter Scott's Celtification': *Ibid*., p. 364.
'their house guests included Grand Duke Michael of Russia': it is not clear to me whether this guest was Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich (1861-1929) or Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich (1878-1918).
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'Saint Columba ... is closely associated with the village': http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/domesday/dblock/GB-240000-816000/page/11 .
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'a local being attacked by a fiercesome (sic) beast': James Carney, *The Loch Ness Monster* (2014), p. 5.

21. The Phantom of the Loch

'Another legend, which is even stranger than that of St Columba and the monster': *The Great Monster Hunt*, p. 74.
'I was driving back to the timber camp at Invermoriston': *Ibid.*
'Unknown to Colin, Alex had been studying the legend': *Ibid.*, p. 75. .
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